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Henk Bakker, Keith G. Jones, Pieter van Wingerden, Toivo Pilli

## Editorial

This issue of *Baptistic Theologies* consists of nine articles, originally papers delivered at the conference ‘Evangelicals and Oppression: Eastern European Perspectives’. The conference was held in Amsterdam, at The International Baptist Study Centre, from 18-20 April 2018. Although the initial idea was to explore the overall topic from wide-ranging perspectives, discussing persecution that evangelicals have met in their history, looking into elements of oppression that evangelicals have created themselves, and presenting research in conflict and forgiveness in the context of external and internal pressures, the result turned out to be somewhat more specific. Most of the papers dealt with church and state relations or observed evangelicals’ behavioural patterns in changing social and political environments – often unfavourable environments, indeed. In short, historical narrative was preferred to theological analysis – which is an expected result when most of the scholars in the room are church historians.

Walter Sawatsky’s two articles set the framework for this whole issue of *BT*, placing the Eastern evangelical story into a wider historical, political, and geographical context. In the introductory paper, about evangelicals tested over two centuries, he discusses the perception of the term ‘evangelical’, shows historical links, and touches upon different responses to external restrictions and persecution, such as ‘discretion’ and ‘valour’. Sawatsky highlights the fact that the evangelicals’ experience of oppression cannot be tied only to the communist era. During the last decades the historiographical scope has expanded, moving away from a narrow focus on centres (St Petersburg, Moscow, and Kiev). For example, new research has emerged about the believers’ communities in Siberia, and other aspects have appeared in Eastern European scholarship, such as migration around *fin de siècle*. Sawatsky is convinced that there is ‘a paradigmatic quality to the Soviet and East European experience of oppression, that can be helpful to Christians elsewhere around the globe who have known oppression, or are back in such situations’.

The ‘Post-Soviet Transformation for Evangelicals, 1991-2018’, which in this issue of *BT* is the concluding article, takes the recent decades as its subject. It brings the discussion up to the present day, characterising the activities of Eastern European believers as influenced both by ‘frenetic evangelism’ and ‘fateful transitions’. The last decade of the twentieth century saw movement towards social ministry, cooperation between church members and secular professionals, and unprecedented involvement of volunteers. The stories in different countries, however, took different

courses. The optimism at the beginning of the millennium was slowly waning in Europe, and believers in some countries – again – began to see law-imposed restrictions, such as in Russia and Central Asia, where juridical obstacles were imposed on religious institutions. The old narrative of church-state relations took new turns: the temptation of allegiance to nationhood, hopes of ending the long history of marginalisation, challenges of state-sponsored majoritarianism, and questions of how to maintain moral integrity.

Ian Randall takes the reader to the nineteenth century, and explores the work of William Nicolson, a talented Scotsman, who strengthened and widened the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Russia, from 1869 to 1897. The article uses archival sources, bringing to light an almost forgotten figure of a ‘Bible-missionary’. Due to the organisational efforts of Nicolson as the BFBS representative, and despite opposition he met from the Orthodoxy and the Tsarist officials, not least from Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the circulation of Scriptures in Russia went from 30,000 in 1869 to 500,000 in 1896. This, in its turn, advanced literacy and Bible knowledge as well as the evangelical movement in this vast Slavic county. The article is an important reminder that, firstly, there is still a broad spectrum of topics, events, and persons in the story of evangelicals, waiting for detailed research; and, secondly, that for studying Eastern evangelical traditions there are rich sources not only in Eastern European countries, but also in Western archives and libraries.

While the history of church-state relations in Eastern Europe often brings to mind Russia and the Soviet Union, Miroslav Franc has chosen a different angle: he gives an account of the early stages of Czech (Bohemian) Baptists in the context of the Habsburg monarchy and its policies towards minority churches. The changes in the country’s legislation in the second half of the nineteenth century, as well as support from the Evangelical Alliance, allowed the Baptists in Bohemia to practise their convictions. Nevertheless, legislative developments towards religious freedoms ‘collided with the rigidity of local authorities, supported by the hostility of the major churches, both Catholic and Protestant’. Franc, using archive materials from the Prague-Vinohrady Baptist Church, introduces the reader to the everyday life of the first Baptists in Bohemia – including attempts to solve legislative questions in relation to their places of worship, negotiate their freedoms with local authorities, and find their role in the wider society, for example, establishing an abstinence society in 1912.

Mary Raber brings the reader to Tsarist Russia and into the decade before World War I. Evangelicals experienced religious freedoms after 1905 as ‘black bread’ instead of the ‘dry crusts’ of the previous period: new enthusiasm brought forth evangelists, sometimes female evangelists, who

gathered large crowds. The Slavic Evangelicals used financial means to build prayer houses and initiate publications. However, the situation was not so straightforward. Raber summarises: ‘... fresh black bread signified a complex and contradictory situation – better than dry crusts, but not as good as the cheese sandwiches of total freedom! In other words, even after 1905 complete religious freedom still evaded the evangelicals.’ The article gives a detailed analysis of pressures that evangelicals met despite formal freedoms, and it gives an account of evangelicals’ attempts to stand for their interests: using connections within and outside the country, engaging in debates, primarily with the Orthodox opponents, and seeking legal justice.

The next two papers in this collection fall into the years after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and have a clearly defined geographical focal point: Omsk in Siberia. Constantine Prokhorov surveys the case of the Siberian Baptist Union Orphans’ Home, near Kulomzino, and offers additional information for understanding the evangelicals’ social ministries. The orphanage existed from 1917 to 1921, with Omsk Baptists playing a crucial role, through their donations of money and food, and other forms of help. In the post-revolution context the orphanage, though a comparatively small institution, offered not only shelter but also spiritual care and education for the inhabitants. Despite some relative freedoms that evangelicals enjoyed during these times, the orphanage was nationalised in 1920 and closed in 1921. Galina Prokhorova adds another facet to Omsk Baptist story: her narrative gives a glimpse into the biographies of two Baptist women who both faced accusation from the Soviet secret service for their religious activities in the 1930s. The political and atheistic pressures had grown worse when compared to the situation twenty years ago. But the two stories, testifying to the spirituality and character of these Baptist women, have two different endings: one accepted martyrdom, another was able to demonstrate faithfulness and wisdom in another way. Even in the hardest times the picture was never only black and white. These short case-study-type ‘chapters’ of Siberian Baptist history add a human and emotional dimension to the present volume.

Johannes Dyck brings into the discussion the trials of German Mennonites in the USSR after World War II – another welcome attempt to ‘zoom in’ and add details to a religious narrative of an ethnic group. The author uses the terminology of ‘totalitarian’ and ‘post-totalitarian’ phases of Soviet society, with 1953, the year of Stalin’s death, as a watershed between the two. He argues, however, that as far as religion is concerned, there existed a transition period (1953-1966) between the two phases. German Mennonites faced restrictions: after the war they were not allowed to register their churches and they were not allowed to join the union of Evangelical

Christians-Baptist (ECB). It was only twenty years later that the Mennonite Brethren joined the ECB structures. The German speaking believers' communities were not affected by the 'thaw' of Khrushchev's time, though some opportunities opened up. For example, after 1956, ethnic Germans were given permission to travel freely in the Soviet Union, which led to emerging German communities in Central Asia and Siberia. But over the years these believers lost their previous identity, and gradually became part of the Russian-speaking ECB spectrum.

The interests of Timofey Cheprasov are in the relations between spirituality, homiletical skills, and preaching. Why in the Russian Baptist setting is the spirituality of the preacher valued more than homiletical knowledge and skills? And with what consequences? Cheprasov mentions the widening gap between academia and Slavic Evangelical churches during communist times. The official ECB publication *Bratskii Vestnik* [Brotherly Herald] described the necessary preaching tools: prayerful and diligent reading of the Bible, belonging to the church and 'being the child of God', keeping a pure heart, and avoiding 'over-intellectualizing' in interpretation. The character and spiritual condition of a preacher was more important than analytical skills, presentation, or ability to use homiletical tools, such as thorough exegesis or rhetorical methods. This 'over-spiritualising' of preaching in Slavic Baptist life led to a special status of preachers as 'God's anointed people', and in this way tended to exempt them from accountability. Somewhat surprisingly, between 1969 and 1988, in *Bratskii Vestnik*, there were no articles giving advice or guidelines for preaching. Or perhaps it should not be surprising – how could one teach techniques of a spiritual, almost mystical, act? It is also possible that the ECB Correspondence Bible Courses, since 1968, may have taken the role that *Bratskii Vestnik* fulfilled earlier.

Cheprasov reaches the year 1988, and the final article of Walter Sawatsky, chronologically, picks up the discussion from there. Sawatsky, discussing the challenges of Eastern European evangelicals since 1991, helps the reader to face present day issues, as has already been mentioned in the early paragraphs of this editorial. 'Post-Soviet transformation' is a gate that opens new avenues for discussion. The story of Eastern European evangelicals, who have faced oppression over the centuries, is a far from sufficiently researched area. Certainly, persecution and external pressures cannot be the only approach in this research. There are new archive materials to be studied and there are new questions to be asked, not least questions about the experience of church members in baptistic communities: aspects of identity, the role of women, exclusiveness and inclusiveness in church practices, family life and the experience of children in the believers' communities, and many more.



There is one more thing to be said: this issue of *Baptistic Theologies* will be the last one, as from 2019 the publication will merge with the *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, and continue under the name of the latter. It may be symbolic that this last issue is discussing topics of baptistic history, as the journal itself, at least with this title and in this form becomes a history. A warm ‘Thank you!’ to every author who over the years has contributed to *Baptistic Theologies*. Continuation under the title *Journal of European Baptist Studies* means that the mission of the publication, to make European Baptist scholarship available to a wider audience, will be fulfilled also in the future with clear vision and academic commitment.

**Revd Dr Toivo Pilli**  
**(Guest Editor and Conference Convener)**



# **Eurasian and Eastern European Evangelicals: Tested over Two Centuries**

Walter Sawatsky

## **Defining Terms: Evangelicals and Oppression<sup>1</sup>**

The oppression of evangelicals has been a persistent legacy, but it has not applied to all of them. Therefore, we must begin by defining evangelicals and oppression. A further query to pursue is: what intensity of oppression has permitted creative survival?

Following the nonviolent moral revolutions of 1989, the collapse of the USSR in 1991, and the transitions to more participatory forms of government initially, which usually included freedom of religion, there was a too-easy assumption that oppression of East European evangelicals had become old history. My working assumption is that this conference entails reviewing the past for the sake of greater clarity in facing our future challenges. This also requires careful differentiation between what we must consider real oppression and merely perceived oppression, such as groups now supporting right wing populist and nationalist agendas of hate of the ‘other’, because they still think of themselves as the oppressed ones – a persecution complex.

In February 2018 *Christian Century* editor David Heim opened his review of a book with the question: ‘is the term *evangelical* meaningful?’<sup>2</sup> Mark Labberton, new President of Fuller Seminary, had just published *Still Evangelical?* In it Labberton stated that popular evangelicalism had become ‘an amalgam of theological views, partisan political debates, regional power blocks, populist visions, racial biases, and cultural anxieties, all mixed in an atmosphere of fear’. Heim added to that confusing picture by noting that, in 2016, 80% of white evangelicals had voted for Donald Trump as president. So, Heim asked, ‘how could a faith tradition devoted to the transforming power of the Gospel align itself so readily with a racially divisive bully whose life has been unashamedly devoted to greed and self-promotion?’ In early April 2018 a group of progressive American evangelicals met for a

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Evangelicals and Oppression: Eastern European Perspectives’ was the title of the conference convened by the International Baptist Theological Study Centre, Amsterdam, at which this material was first presented in April 2018.

<sup>2</sup> David Heim, review of Mark Labberton, ed., *Still Evangelical? Insiders Reconsider Political, Social, and Theological Meaning* (Carol Stream: IVP Books), in *Christian Century*, February 14, 2018, 45-48.

‘Red Letter Revival’, a ‘revival of Jesus and justice’, in order to protest such ‘toxic evangelicalism’<sup>3</sup>

Defining evangelicalism has now reached the point where many evangelicals hesitate to identify with those above descriptors. David Bebbington’s history of British Evangelicals several decades ago identified four features: a conversionist view of faith, a substitutionary understanding of Jesus’ crucifixion, a strong view of Scriptural authority, and an activist impulse to share the faith. This is widely considered the conventional definition, yet because evangelicals are now present globally, it is difficult to apply the label to evangelicals everywhere without taking into account the deep cultural, linguistic, and historical shaping that accounts for the rich diversity. That is particularly so for our subject, since in a widely-read survey of global evangelicals, the author appeared not to know of Slavic Evangelicals or persons of Eurasia’s multi-ethnic peoples.<sup>4</sup> At the Capetown assembly of the Lausanne movement in 2010, their representatives were largely overlooked.

On the other hand, recently deceased Billy Graham left us with two key legacies, so said his historian Grant Wacker:

From beginning to end, Graham voiced boilerplate evangelical theology focused on a simple, non-sectarian call to faith... Whatever the stated text [of Graham’s sermons] the actual text of every sermon was the same, John 3:16: ‘For God so loved the world’... Graham practiced marital fidelity, financial transparency, honesty about numbers, and refusal to criticize others.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Graham did not remain static, but demonstrated a ‘march from a conservative to a progressive position on most of the key social issues of the day ... calling racism a sin’. Secondly, he left a legacy of ‘evangelical ecumenism’, seeking to build bridges among fundamentalists, Pentecostals, mainline Protestants, Catholics, and others. Still another key line from Wacker’s testimonial was: ‘His ministry helped millions see that no matter how badly they had messed up their lives, Christ offered them a second chance.’<sup>6</sup>

Turning then to the reality that during the decades from 1945 to 1990, when large parts of Eurasia and Eastern Europe were not included in the dialogue among global evangelicals, other mental adjustments become necessary. One thing that quickly became apparent after 1991, was that the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. They also stated that ‘in word, worship and witness, this ‘revival of Jesus and justice’ will stand in stark contrast to the distorted Christian nationalism that many white evangelical leaders have become known for’.

<sup>4</sup> The reference is to Brian Stanley’s *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2013, vol.5 of *A History of Evangelicalism*).

<sup>5</sup> Grant Wacker, ‘Billy Graham (1918-2018): A Preacher’s vast Legacy’, *Christian Century*, March 14, 2018, 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> See also *Christianity Today*, March 2018, a special Billy Graham tribute.

widespread prohibition of mission in the USSR and Eastern Europe had been lifted legally. That has meant that in very basic ways, there were and still are some hopeful signs that a widely shared understanding of *missio Dei* missiology unites across quite diverse barriers in that region.<sup>7</sup> Some of the dimensions of that challenge need our attention.

Here we will concentrate on the religious elements of oppression, but they have never been clearly separated from social and political issues between majority and minority cultures.

## Ways of Thinking about Continuities and Changes

There are patterns from the past shaping world Christianity today, but for our Eurasian and East European focus, the shaping since the Protestant Reformation looms large. In contrast to Western Europe and the Americas' Western Christian formations and reformations, Eastern Christian formation and spread, as well as the more major long-term impact of a Muslim context, has made the Eurasian/East European evangelical story singularly unique, hence of greater potential significance globally for the future. After all, it was a key territory spanning the east/west territorial divide, during late modernity, when the north/south global divide was becoming much more crucial for the future of Christianity.

In too much of missiological literature the imagined paradigm shift is primarily a shift of power southward that overlooks too much. That is, Christian growth in the 'Global South' has been outstripping the north during the past two centuries, and since the 1970s the West European and North American centres of Christianity have been in serious decline. At the same time, growth statistics do not mean that decision-making power has shifted to the South, because of the drastic inequalities of economic power. The Euroasian story has been through at least a century of limits to economic power, and limits to Christian freedoms, that have begun to change.<sup>8</sup>

The West European First and Second Reformations developed as major state power shifts had emerged.<sup>9</sup> Eastern Orthodoxy was struggling to survive the collapse of Byzantium after 1453, and over the next several centuries the rise of a Russian empire, as well as the growing colonial power of a half dozen European empires help account for considerable religious

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<sup>7</sup> I have in mind the Central and Eastern European Association of Mission Studies (CEEAMS) that was formed in 2008, and its journal *Acta Missiologicae*.

<sup>8</sup> There is a lengthier argument for East European evangelical experience during the twentieth century, as a paradigm for Christians globally, in my Menno Simons Lectures of 2014, published as *Going Global with God as Mennonite for the 21st Century* (Newton, KS: Bethel College, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> See Walter Sawatsky, ed., *Prophetic and Renewal Movements – The Prague Consultations* (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Study #47, 2009).

anxiety and unrest. The Reformations introduced a new legacy of Christian adaptation and resistance. By 1648, across Europe various confessionally Protestant and Catholic regions were either supported by the state (Holy Roman Empire) or were tolerated by local rulers who valued their religious minority population's industry, or they were oppressed by law or by other Christian bodies, or by manipulated mobs. This left the impression that the Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and Catholic traditions became state-supported churches, so that only the church tradition from the left-wing reformers remained as facing the hostility of state authorities, because they were committed to a separation of church and state. In actual fact, there were areas where Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic churches were living under state oppression, in other areas they were at least tolerated as a minority of the population, and at times the state-supported churches assisted their fellow believers, or failed to do so.

Evangelical emergence as a more widespread movement came out of efforts to revive the intentions of the early modern reformers, whose new church traditions had lost their spiritual appeal. The Pietist Movement, clearly resonating with efforts of 150-250 years earlier, was the primary stimulus for the rise of Protestant Christian mission globally. Also, Czech Brethren and English preachers, using portions of Scripture translated into the local language and spreading devotional books, drew inspiration from the sixteenth-century ideals and practices.

The evangelicalism that emerged in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century became known as the Pietist Awakening on the continent, and as the Evangelical Awakening in Britain and North America. There was both an evangelistic and an ecumenical character to these awakenings, which, emerging on such a large scale, brought new aspects to the whole evangelical spirituality. Peoples' responses to sermons were expected to be individual and visible – a moment in time when persons repented of their sinfulness and experienced the saving grace of Jesus Christ, often also as they were reading the Gospels and felt their heart 'strangely warmed', to use Wesley's description. The new piety an awakened person adopted had to be shared, urging one's loved ones and friends, then neighbours, to experience the joy of salvation. It did not necessarily mean leaving one's congregation or church tradition because it seemed lifeless, but rather to find others of like mind across the religious spectrum, forming coalitions to spread the Pietist Awakening.

Historians have described this awakening as the 'religion of the heart' instead of a rational agreement or consent to classic Christian dogma.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart. A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

Human beings were always also individuals with thoughts and emotions, but a kind of paradigm shift had been in process since the early sixteenth century, steadily giving greater recognition to individual personhood than to tribe or nation. To think about 'Evangelicals and Oppression' in the twenty-first century forces us to pay attention to the tensions between the individual and the group, and to how the appeals to personal experience, and to reasoned faith, as the basis of authority overshadow the long-established appeals to Scripture and living tradition. The strength and flaw of evangelicalism was its stress on the personal, and its minimal appreciation of ecclesiology.

This Evangelical/Pietist Movement became the seed bed of an international evangelical movement, also actively missionary, skilled in institutional organisation, with a non-hierarchical structure that allowed for rapid replacement of leaders who were imprisoned or killed. This is true also of East European evangelicals, helping them to navigate through years of communist and atheistic oppression in the twentieth century. However, we also know that evangelicals experienced oppression (from state authorities, majority churches, and from fearful and unfriendly fellow citizens) well before communist rule, and also after.

## **The Communist Era and War on Religion in the USSR**

A persistent theme in Slavic evangelical growth was its special divine mission to the West and to the world. The 1905 toleration edict in Russia made it possible for even the sects, as free churches were often named, to submit applications for legal recognition, based on a constitution and confession of faith statement. In that setting the Evangelical Christians in the capital, St Petersburg, were dreaming of a vast missionary project – to win Russia for Christ. Once that was launched through organised evangelism and mission, Ivan Prokhanov even spoke in print of a divine mission to the West, whose civilisations were perceived to be in decline.

Some new political parties began addressing themselves to the needs of the peasantry. What some of their thinkers noticed was that the sectarian groups differed from the typical Orthodox peasant, who was still scarcely better off since the end of serfdom in 1861. The sectarians relied on their religious structures that had been formed during the decades of oppression – prison and exile – for providing each other with mutual aid. Their leaders required less academic training than practical training with mentors. The sectarians' reputation for a better work ethic, since they avoided alcohol, was also noticed.

Following the October Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were intent on a quick withdrawal from the war. Lenin's secretary, Vladimir Bonch-

Bruevich, urged that the evangelical sectarians be allowed to prove themselves, by granting them the right of alternative service instead of service in the Red Army. Bonch-Bruevich and his wife had accompanied the pacifist Doukhobors to Canada and were personally acquainted with the leading Tolstoyan V. G. Chertkov and prominent Evangelical Christians. The decree to that effect of April 1918 made possible a united society of religions to oversee appeals for conscientious objector status of church members from the Tolstoyans, Evangelical Christians, Baptists, Molokany, and Mennonites to confirm the religious-based pacifism of applicants. Other elements among the Bolsheviki steadily undercut these efforts, as the new Red Army was employed against the White Army in the civil war. There were many cases where pacifist Christians were denied a hearing, were ordered into uniform or were immediately shot or sent to prison.<sup>11</sup> This produced a new list of martyrs whose stories helped account for the resistance the Baptist, Evangelical Christian, and Pentecostal Unions demonstrated in 1923 and again at congresses in 1926, when they were finally forced to remove the pacifist clauses from their constitutions.

From a political perspective, those among the Bolsheviki who had hoped to work with the sectarian peasants, in spite of their religious commitments, lost influence because the religious commitments of the sectarians were not easily broken. When we consider the turmoil of the early years of communism in power, its commitment from the first to crush the Russian Orthodox institutions totally did not waver initially, but steadily those atheist activists who organised the League of Militant Godless, which by 1929 had become a virtual arm of the ruling authority, applied a more blanket opposition to all forms of religious expression. So the period from 1929 to 1937 became the most intense time of oppression, when virtually all public expressions of religious worship and activism were crushed.

Scholarship has too long focused on what happened at the centre, usually meaning around St Petersburg, Moscow, and Kiev. Especially since the new scholarship from state archives across the Soviet Union, we have become more aware of some demographic changes, already in process throughout the nineteenth century, becoming ever more complex in the twentieth century. By 2010 new scholars were sharing their archival research findings in published dissertations.<sup>12</sup> That research explored and compared state interference in religion, or the scholar was a cultural anthropologist

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<sup>11</sup> For details see Walter Sawatsky, 'Pacifist Protestants in Soviet Russia between the Wars', in *The Long Way of Russian Pacifism* (Russian), ed. by Tatiana Pavlova (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of World History, 1997), pp. 262-284 [English version available from author].

<sup>12</sup> Less known of new dissertations is A. V. Gorbatov, *Gosudarstvo i religioznye organizatsii Sibiri 1940-e - 1960-e gody* [The State and Religious Organisations in Siberia 1940s-1960s] (Tomsk: Tomsk State Pedagogical University, 2008). His introduction cites other dissertations, and of the 21 archives within Siberia of special interest is his access to regional KGB documents in Kemerovo region.



exploring minority ethnic groups and their language and culture. Invariably, whether such scholars were Christian or not, their approach was to contribute positively to the treasure of Russia's multi-cultural complexity.

The end of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century was a period of massive people migration from west to east in Russia – quite similar to the well-known east to west migrations in North America. Evangelicalism did emerge within a Russian Orthodox context, that included the emergence around the 1880s of an Orthodox Mission Society. But the migrations, some of them due to exiling dissident or minority religious activists, and deportations of peoples during World War II, resulted in the presence of evangelicals in Siberia from the Urals to the Pacific. By 1930, with Orthodoxy and its missionary arm crushed, the eastern half of the USSR was never able to generate a dominant Orthodox ethos. It became the region of the greatest spread of atheism, but it was also in those regions that the evangelicals flourished more readily than did Orthodoxy, given the evangelical democratic, non-hierarchical style, and skilled reliance on communication channels, effective enough that the Samizdat journals and reports were quickly circulated. This was also the area where shortwave religious radio programming was more easily heard since, even for the atheistic government, to jam thinly populated vast regions was not cost-effective.<sup>13</sup>

After World War II there was a slow emergence of differentiated ways of relating to the religious communities, the latter initially with deeply cowed leadership, nevertheless seeking to restore as much church life as possible. Until the death of Stalin, the oppressive hand of the Party at all levels still dominated, but with the emergence of Nikita Khrushchev to key leadership, it was the more ideologically committed elements of the Party that attempted a renewed programme to free the population from what it deemed superstitious and harmful vestiges of ignorance. It was the effort at a higher quality of 'scientific atheism', of a thoroughgoing education of the ideal Soviet man and woman, including at times the separation of children from their irredeemably fanatically religious parents, that became a phase of religious oppression much harder to resist.

## **Comparisons to the East European Experience**

The states of Eastern Europe that became part of the Soviet sphere of power by 1948 had significantly different histories, before submitting to communist

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<sup>13</sup> Valuable for Siberian research is Andrei Savin, *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i evangel'skie tserkvi Sibiri v 1920 - 1941 gg. Dokumenty i materialy* [The Soviet State and Evangelical Churches 1920-1941, Documents & Materials] (Novosibirsk: Posokh, 2004). Several others that followed on Mennonites are also available in English.

governance. Throughout the nineteenth century, the empires struggled with imposing a church and state uniformity, such as the Hapsburg Empire that retained control over Eastern Europe when the Holy Roman Empire collapsed in 1806 during the turmoil of the Napoleonic wars. Emperor Franz Josef in the 1870s, given his own reduced religious sentiments, attempted to improve the lot of the serfs, and to follow a policy of tolerance within his multi-religious empire. Also during the nineteenth century, more of the Ottoman Empire's European lands came under the control of the Russian and Hapsburg Empires and that meant the liberation of Christians to a better status – Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant.

Comparing East European evangelicals with those in the Russian Empire, we note some important differences. In general, the free church or evangelical churches that emerged from Poland to Bulgaria were largely mission-initiated churches, in contrast to more indigenous initiated churches in Russia. That can easily be over-stated, since we must keep in mind that, throughout the nineteenth century, ethnic migrations out of Europe to America and to the Russian Empire's eastern regions enhanced both the multi-confessional complexity and the cross-fertilisation of evangelical thinking. Again, as a generalisation (with numerous exceptions), by 1948 the majority of the free churches across Eastern Europe were still dependent on financial, moral, and educational support from the missions, which continued during the communist era where possible. In contrast, starting at least by 1930, Soviet evangelicals had virtually no direct support from their Western counterparts. Indeed, it was in their interest to stress that they were not a foreign-controlled alien religion, but genuinely Slavic.

Between 1960 and 1976 in particular, for Soviet and East European evangelicals, the ways of resisting, or the ways of finding a path of Christian faithfulness, were more complex. When in the mid-1970s, the British Council of Churches commissioned a book to convey to Western readers the religious situation in Eastern Europe, they entitled it *Discretion and Valour*.<sup>14</sup> They drew on the variety of historical experiences since the time of the Reformation, to point out that some Christians had chosen or been forced into the way of valour, that led to suffering and even to martyrdom; whereas others had followed a way of 'discretion' – possibly a rather British word – for it involved finding ways of seeming to obey state authorities, and finding the moments to disobey with more impunity. Toivo Pilli's study of the Estonian evangelical experience for that time chose a similarly apt image:

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<sup>14</sup> Trevor Beeson, *Discretion and Valour. Religious Conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London & Philadelphia: Fount Paperbacks & Fortress Press, 1982). Beeson was the gifted writer providing a common style, but the book was based on drafts from a cohort of experts, including staff from Keston College.

*Dance or Die*.<sup>15</sup> For many, at the time they were faced with such ‘choices’ of response. This became a time of deep divisions within Christian communities, that suffered under the reality of distrust and discord within their own ranks, and the ugly fact that state authorities were constantly playing Christians against each other, by distorting what their fellow Christians had said or done. Since these testings included widespread use of torture and mistreatment, even if not as extreme as under the worst of Stalinism, still persons were broken down under the pressure – some permanently, others found the way to recovery. How then to find forgiveness and reconciliation has continued to be an issue that has sustained church divisions, as was the case as far back as the time of the Donatists.

Divisions over discretion and valour issues were less sharp across Eastern Europe. In almost every country there were efforts to suppress religious practice, as in the Stalinist years, but with limited success. Catholic territories like Poland, the Slovak part of then Czechoslovakia, and even Hungarian Catholics were led by bishops strongly opposed to communism because of its atheism. By the late 1970s, with the election of Pope John Paul II (Krakow), Catholic *Ostpolitik* also showed readiness to negotiate with national authorities, in recognising the national sentiments of long standing. Such resistance was an encouragement to the faithful but did not ease their situation. Later, after the initial post-communist euphoria, that Catholic legacy of resentment has borne fruit in the emergence of hyper-nationalist political Catholic governments that bode problems for other religious communities as secondary citizens, and the blocking of sanctuary for new refugees. A similar tendency can be denoted with the re-election of President Orban in Hungary.

In the countries just mentioned, after World War II, some form of state financial support (though a steadily shrinking amount) for the former state churches continued. Given such arrangements, the Protestant churches (in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia) were granted rights and benefits proportionate to their size. This did not apply to the evangelicals, the free churches who tried to survive by voluntary support plus foreign assistance. Thus many of the theological schools and monasteries were able to continue, also with external support. In Romania and Bulgaria, as majority Orthodox countries and with patterns of accommodation to Ottoman controls, the socialist state efforts at control of leadership appointments were largely successful, less so of the popular renewal movements such as the

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<sup>15</sup> Toivo Pilli, *Dance or Die: The Shaping of Estonian Baptist Identity under Communism* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008, vol. 37 in *Studies in Baptist History and Thought*). Pilli conveys a process of identity re-shaping of four Estonian evangelical traditions, forcefully merged by communist authorities, calling the four dance steps: unity out of diversity, Word and Spirit tension, common goal for evangelism and mission, bearing fruit through ethical testing.

Lord's Army in Romania, or the Catholic *Focolare* in Hungary and Poland, or the free churches. As legacy for the post-communist era, it was the Orthodox in Bulgaria that continued to struggle with competing leadership synods to the present. In this context there was a wide spectrum of collaboration of church leaders with state power, in part forms of discretion, but also outright careerist betrayal of churchly integrity.

It was the more Protestant majority of Christians in East Germany that presented a mixture of valour and discretion approaches. Aside from the Evangelical Czech Brethren attempting to avoid Cold War partisanship, the synod of the Kirche der Union (Lutheran and Reformed) in East Germany sought to maintain its cross-border union with the Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands (EKD) in West Germany until the Berlin Wall was built in 1961. Soon after, its East German leaders began stressing Kirche im Sozialismus (church within socialism) as its church-political stance. That is, it affirmed its understanding of Christianity as 'hope for the oppressed', recognising where it found common ground with Marxist socialist claims to strive for the good of all the people, and at the same time, like the prophets of old, to speak the voice of conscience on behalf of people where state policy and practice violated Christian norms.

Stasi files later revealed the broad network of surveillance under which churches and their leaders functioned. In one famous case, a theologian prominent in the group of five that negotiated the transition from GDR to a democratic state, acknowledged that he had indeed been a regular reporter to the Stasi, but had tried to do his best for the church and had too often failed in his intention. He lost his churchly job, and the respect of many, moved to West Germany, and gradually rebuilt his life and public trust through his openness. In other cases, the persons listed in Stasi files as co-workers did not find the way to repentance, forgiveness, and recovery – to use the Christian terms for what was happening, or failing to happen sufficiently, among church leaders across Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

## **Slavic Evangelicals and the Collapse of the Soviet Union**

The end of the Soviet Union story for evangelicals and state interference involved more complications. Perhaps it should have been possible to sustain the Soviet Union as a democratic state, since multi-party elections did take place and monologues in the Soviet media quickly changed to 'dialogue' by 1990. Even churchmen were initially elected to office as persons respected by the public, a line of argument that explained why the Polish elections of Spring 1989 gave the Solidarity Party a majority. Among the societies that had sprung up were charity societies run by evangelicals across the network of Soviet republics. Clearly Soviet President Gorbachev and his closest

associates were committed to a deep reform of Soviet society, but Gorbachev continued to believe it must be done within a Communist Party framework.

The deep roots of anti-Russian sentiments built up over the decades of Soviet (and even Tsarist) rule, turned out to be overwhelming. That the three Baltic countries were among the first to withdraw from the Union was unsurprising, given the cultural and linguistic differences, even if many Russians had migrated to those regions. It was the way Yeltsin (as head of the Russian Republic) began stressing sovereignty of the Russian Federation, over against the USSR, that triggered the collapse of the USSR, replaced by a much less binding Commonwealth of Independent States, where each of the remaining former republics claimed their own sovereignty, making the 'commonwealth' primarily an economic union, although national currencies emerged almost immediately.

Why did the evangelicals so quickly join the trend toward national separation? The All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB), for example, dissolved early in 1991 to become a union of independent ECB unions. This came after a short period of sustaining a central office in Moscow, headed by a troika of former executive secretaries of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, plus directors of mission and education departments. Soon, in almost all the new states, the leader of the evangelical union was titled 'president' as in the state system, leaving a small office with a new executive secretary facilitating communication between unions, and overseeing a new church magazine.<sup>16</sup>

Specific developments are worth noting here in a brief overview. Firstly, evangelism and mission became the primary focus everywhere, initially with many new converts – some regions being more active, systematic, or successful than others. Secondly, there was an attempt to establish a theological college or seminary, but that rather quickly resulted in at least forty such 'colleges' across the former territory of the Soviet Union. The head of the first of the seminaries (Odessa) then organised the Euro-Asiatic Accreditation Association (EAAA) to assist in accreditation, since this was not possible within the new state systems. Thirdly, a variety of approaches to addressing societal issues emerged, usually by means of cooperation with service and mission agencies from abroad. Training evangelicals as professionals for social services became a delayed dream.

All three ECB 'unions' made evangelism and mission their priority, the independent ECB and the legally registered ECB traditions cooperating as much as they could; this was seldom true with the Reform Baptist

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<sup>16</sup> In 2018 this Euro-Asiatic Union of ECB Unions, still with an executive secretary but now based in Israel, had as new President the President of the Belarus Union, Leonid Mikhovich, now seeking to foster a renewed common vision.

churches that had been drifting – also thanks to external influences – into greater isolation from other believers. By following the division into national unions, the work of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation among the divided groups lacked centres to take the initiative, and the reduction in shared gatherings even within each union, also accounts for the minimal attempts to deal with the past.

In the wider society, the most problematic event was the economic collapse that soon followed the shift to rapid privatisation without clear planning. Corruption came to dominate, even in the many new banks that sprang up. The massive inflation of the rouble (or equivalent currencies in sister countries), causing a black economy relying on the American dollar as cash, deeply affected the lives of all, including the evangelical church unions. So the 1990s became the time of the influx of countless Western mission societies, or mere individuals bringing cheque books, the majority of whom were astoundingly ignorant of Soviet Christian history. A renewed Orthodoxy found itself threatened by the blatant proselytism of Protestants inside their churches. A crisis conference of leaders in the summer of 1994 produced some understandings toward restraint and respect between evangelicals and Orthodox leaders, both sides also lacking the finances for their tasks.<sup>17</sup> In many episcopal regions, financial support got arranged with local entrepreneurs, soon generating suspicions of corruption. Among evangelicals, the corruption was less apparent, compared to the rapid way in which urban churches in particular became dependent on sponsors from the West for pastoral salaries and financing of building renovation or new buildings, the latter at times driven by a desire to show off evangelical achievements. In the Baltic regions and Western Ukraine, the influence of prosperity Gospel preaching by missionaries created discord and distrust. In general, within Russia the capacity for central church unions to continue creative programmes was soon stagnant, except where outside supporters funded colleges, literature publications, and too often exercised controls over staffing and acceptable theologies.

The pattern of financial reporting during the Soviet years had long been a source of distrust among observant members. Congregations were expected to cover local costs, including pastoral support, then send a considerable portion of income to the office of the regional superintendent, and also to the national office of the ECB, Pentecostal, or Adventist traditions. Reporting was partial when making claims for increase or decline

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<sup>17</sup> The gathering, co-financed by the East Europe committee of the American National Council of Christian Churches, had a representative attendance of Orthodox and Evangelical leaders, plus some Western representatives. It resulted in open exchanges of issues of proselytism with a resolution to exercise more restraint and show more fraternal respect, but could not be continued regularly for financial reasons, and even the failure of Russian Orthodox and Baptist leaders to consult since 1988 was noted with mutual regret. Drifting apart was due to internal preoccupations with restructuring.

of support, rarely a comprehensive report of balanced books. After the transition, support for the central office dropped as many of the Central Asian unions lost members to outward migration. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan soon withheld moral and financial support for ECB ecumenical links, including with the European Baptist Federation whose Western culture with women in leadership they rejected. The Ukraine ECB soon formed a close tie with its counterparts in Canada, thus able to engage in active evangelism, even as organisations like John McArthur ministries of USA conducted its own ministries, hiring the best local ministers as translators. Rare was the organisation that regularly circulated full financial reporting.

The above-mentioned situation remains an obstacle to trust, even if there is an argument for keeping church activities below the radar in situations where corrupt authorities might demand payments.<sup>18</sup> Finding ways to ‘do the dance’ about money in corrupt societies, with integrity, could be helpful if Eurasian churches had opportunities to learn from South European regions that had wrestled with such issues for longer. More likely and perhaps more helpful might be sharing experiences on financial issues with the many recent immigrants to Germany and USA from their own traditions.

## **Factors to Ponder in the Context of Oppression: Now and the Future**

There is a paradigmatic quality to the Soviet and East European experience of oppression, that can be helpful to Christians elsewhere around the globe who have known oppression, or are back in such situations, to share wisdom with each other. The wisdom of the Americans in such a situation is simply not there. Yet the opportunities for leaders from Eurasia/Eastern Europe to meet Christian leaders from Asia, Africa, and Latin America are still very infrequent, not easily fostered. For the sake of the health of Christianity as a whole, this needs to change.

Ways in which such increased global interaction might increase merit attention. When we look back at the past century of Christian mission, the congress of 1910 in Edinburgh did not really anticipate much of what actually happened. Yet, by 2010, it had been taken for granted that the African continent had been transformed into a Christian continent, but with Islam rapidly expanding southward from the Sahara. The North American Christians had become the largest contingent of missionaries sent abroad. The Slavic Christian world, however, was unable to participate in that

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<sup>18</sup> A helpful and rare dissertation excerpt is Sergey Chervonenko (with Mark. R. Elliott), ‘Tithes, Offerings, and Stewardship in Russian Evangelical Churches’, *East-West Church & Ministry Report*, vol. 25, No. 4 (Fall 2017) 1-4, with Elliott’s bibliographical postscript.

massive Christian mission impact on Africa, nor could it send missionaries to Asia.

During the era (1961-1991) when the International Missionary Council was holding global mission assemblies, the evangelicals associated with Billy Graham were holding global assemblies on evangelisation, then on mission, starting in Lausanne 1974, with periodic assemblies thereafter till 2010. It is very difficult to claim that evangelicals in Eurasia and Eastern Europe benefitted from such gatherings, to the degree that Christians from the West and South did, but they were also not totally absent. In hindsight, what became more striking was that the Lausanne equivalent of a global congress on mission – Pretoria 2010 – had mainly token representation from Eastern Europe and Eurasia, some of its scholars engaging in critical reflection with each other in 2011. What seems lacking for the East European side is a public review and assessment of those assemblies – the themes addressed and the ways in which such topics began to shape local action – in order to build a more active dialogue for the future. No doubt the extensive change in church leadership in Eurasia post 1989 explains the decline of contacts, plus by now a new generation of evangelical leaders without memories of such encounters has emerged, thus lacking a sense of urgency about moving toward more forthright and open discussions of differences. This helps account for an increased isolation of East European evangelicals from global evangelicalism.

There is also the problem that has become more acute, of American evangelicals becoming more insular, having learned to view the New York twin towers attack of 11 September 2001 as of ‘global significance’. That event, and the fearmongering that followed, seriously limited American readiness to help finance global gatherings of Christian leaders. That insularity has included a drastically reduced diet of serious news for Americans about global developments.

Since both the mission and service workers for bridging of worlds have been in a state of steady decline since 1989, is there some third alternative to reverse that? The global explosion of electronic and digital media has created training possibilities that could have been used more effectively. Access to online courses, seminars, and e-books is more available than ever before, but still too costly and needing better coordination. There is a world of electronic and digital communication that has expanded communication possibilities, that might be better utilised than it has been. This seems modest, but it is still worth noting that access to online seminars and courses is easier than ever before. Another reality, given the major outward migration of evangelical families from the former USSR territories to Germany, Canada, and USA since 1987, is that such immigrants have much greater incentives to stay in touch with the ‘old country’. There



are many Russian-Germans who have been returning for short-term assignments to assist Russian, Ukrainian, and Central Asian church communities in their work and teaching. Teachers from Russia have been offering training sessions for their Russian/Ukrainian communities along the Canadian and American west coast, the funding also coming from the new American citizens covering the travel costs of teachers and beyond that contributing to costs because the Russian and Ukrainian economies have remained stagnant. In missiological terms, the label 'reverse mission' fits for now.

### **A Lesson from Church History: Religious Minorities Matter**

Persecution during the first three centuries of Christianity was sporadic and varied in intensity, yet by the time of Constantine perhaps four million adherents had made the new religion a factor in terms of social order. Even after the 'peace of the church' following toleration in 313, that 'peace' or 'toleration' did not apply outside the Roman Empire, nor did oppression ever fully disappear within. Among the more major 'times of trial' were the bloody persecutions of the Church of the East, by then the largest expression of Christianity. The Syrian Orthodox tradition of millions as far away as India, was reduced to a few hundred thousand around 1200. There were centuries of conflict between Christian and Muslim cultures around the Mediterranean, and periods of co-existence and reduced oppression in specific regions. Since the whole world seems to have noticed the five-hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017, there are legacies from that period forward still worth keeping in mind.

One of the longest lasting 'empires', aside from the Byzantine, was the Holy Roman Empire (800-1806). Around 1500 the Empire was controlled by the Hapsburgs, but its structure was astonishingly fluid. It was an effort to unite a great variety of local forms of feudal governance by providing central legal norms, while the Western Christian church, under the Pope of Rome, sought to ensure a moral order. The big threat perceived in Martin Luther and others like him, was that the political and religious integration of society could be undercut. A century before, the reforming councils had heard reformer John Hus articulate his vision and had him burned at the stake. That did not stop the reforms in Bohemia.

It is widely known that the Lutheran Reformation was in disagreement, even in conflict, with Zwingli and Calvin's reforms, never mind the split off group from Zwingli that was dubbed the Anabaptists, who explicitly avowed a separation of church from state. That 'Radical Reformation' movement appearing in numerous places, drew the attention of the authorities when, in 1525 in Zurich, a few radicals ended their Bible

study with the baptism of adults, rejecting their formal baptism as infants. By 1527 the imperial authorities had reacted by declaring the Anabaptists as uprisers or ‘revolutionaries’, threatening the social order, and ordered such to be executed. That law and several more like it between 1525 and 1529 remained in force till 1806, though enforced only where possible. In some cases, local lords took the prerogative to grant specific religious rights to such religious minorities within their estates. After the defeat of the Hapsburg forces in the Low Countries, the Netherlands became a republic, and the Dutch Reformed church, though a statistical minority, was recognised as the official church. This meant that the other churches gradually gained more tolerance. This made possible the disproportionately major role the *Doopsgezinde*, the Reformed and other Dutch church bodies played for centuries in advocating for their more oppressed fellow believers in Europe.

By the time toleration became more widespread after 1750, it had been the voices from the Enlightenment that provided the philosophical underpinning. Nevertheless, as recent studies in communication theory have made clear, the gradual easing of pressure on religious minorities was not simply a top-down story.<sup>19</sup> There was a dialectic at play throughout the history. The breaking up of the feudal order through the formation of kingly sovereignty claims as well as the formation of nation states, including the shift from royal rule to elected parliamentary governance, steadily emptied the legal structure of the Holy Roman Empire of its power and authority. Similarly the proliferation of Protestant traditions, also with the support from a Protestant Britain, forced the Roman church to surrender claims of control. This was a protracted development, filled with exceptions, but my point to stress here is the factor, recognised rather late, that religious minorities played creative roles in securing their increased freedoms. Their device for communicating beyond themselves was to send letters of appeal to fellow believers outside their area, who could appeal to governing authorities and to the public to help change public opinion.

## **Ways of Discretion and Valour for Eastern European Evangelicals**

The story in Eastern Europe and Eurasia is like that within the Holy Roman Empire, yet also different. With the defeat of the Byzantine army in 1452, the Byzantine Orthodoxy that survived was reduced to the status of the Christian millet, its patriarch (now called ethnarch) was allowed religious and legal authority over the Orthodox, whereas the Ottoman Empire

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<sup>19</sup> Astrid von Schlachta, *Gefahr oder Segen? Die Täufer in der Politischen Kommunikation* [Danger or Blessing? The Role of Anabaptists in Political Communication] (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2009).

constituted a fusion of political and Muslim religious institutions. Those who converted to Islam were absorbed, those who remained Christian had reduced rights, including periodic persecution. North of Byzantium, eventually the prince of Muscovy secured greater sovereignty over other princes, and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch threw his support behind the Muscovite tsar in 1589. Yet there were many dissenting movements, within the gradually expanding Russian Empire.

Sociologically speaking, in Russian areas, as was true within the West European world, the religious dissenters (or reformers from their point of view) tended to fall into two types. One type could be characterised as focused on legalisms: making the proper sign of the cross or removing Greek novelties from the true Russian liturgy. Others were more spiritualist. Those should not be seen as polar opposites, since at various stages in their development such religious minority groups were more legalist and sectarian, or more spiritualist and libertarian. The Old Believer communities, consistently persecuted throughout their history to the present, had developed forms of community life that accounted for them becoming by 1850 the basis for Russian industrial growth. Meeting in Moscow for a conference during the brief toleration era after 1905, its speakers advocated for stronger emphasis on quality of schooling for their children, greater control by elected representatives of parish finances, and even for the right of women to speak publicly.

This is relevant because the rise of evangelicalism took place over about two centuries within these contexts. The differences between the Slavic world and the Western Catholic/Protestant world, accounts for the pronounced sense of difference, or at least of differentiation, linking East European Baptists, Evangelical Christians, and Pentecostals to aspects of an Orthodox ethos,<sup>20</sup> whereas the West European Baptists were more attuned to the cultural changes of their context. What all have in common is their persistence as religious minorities, nowhere a culturally or politically dominant force in society. What they also have in common is that their alternative model of being Christian churches was noticed by the surrounding population.

During the second socialist phase (1945-1990) the Christian churches, including the evangelicals, followed multiple pathways that we must keep in mind. After 1945 Soviet territory had reached its greatest extent, including all of the Ukraine, the three Baltic states, Siberia stretching to Kamchatka, and all of the Central Asian republics. It was a multi-confessional state, still insisting on an atheist worldview as dominant everywhere, but having been

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<sup>20</sup> Constantine Prokhorov, *Russian Baptists and Orthodoxy, 1960-1990: A Comparative Study of Theology, Liturgy, and Traditions* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2013).

forced by the threat of the invaders, to grant some level of tolerance to the believers.

The major disruption came when by 1958, in an effort to revive the purity of commitment to Communist Party beliefs, a second ‘war’ on religion, somewhat more subtle in style but massively subsidised, reduced to a third the number of functioning religious societies (the secularised label for congregations or parishes), and concentrated on weaning the younger generation and the educated away from religious faith. This attempt at establishing controls over a subdued religious leadership elite was resisted at the grass roots level, and the evangelical communities soon challenged the legitimacy of centralised leadership.

If by 1945 there was established one all-union council of Evangelical Christians, Baptists, Pentecostals (later also Mennonite Brethren),<sup>21</sup> the ‘union’ very soon struggled with disunity. The national congresses, when finally allowed to meet in 1960 and triennially thereafter, always had some variant on ‘unity’ as theme. Yet the formation of a competing Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists, representing underground evangelicals, had signalled a major split in 1962. By the early 1980s an independent union of ECB churches had broken with the Reform Baptist leadership (also in part opposing central intransigence) and sought legal registration, without agreeing to state demands to limit their missionary activism. Throughout this period the Pentecostals chafed under the All-Union Council, finally deciding to form their own legally recognised union just before the end of the Soviet Union. The Mennonite Brethren who had joined in 1966 also chafed, with resistance particularly strong in Central Asia where an anti-ecumenical sentiment prevailed. Both the Pentecostal unions and the Seventh Day Adventist unions had formed unregistered (illegal) and registered unions, splitting over issues of state interference. Nor was this splitting of church traditions only an evangelical problem, also within Russian and Ukrainian Orthodoxy, that heavy hand of state control of church life had resulted in dissident and competing groups of churches.

All sides experienced the disunity of the evangelicals as painful, because the general public dismissed them as sectarians, missing the message of unity in Christ all those unions of churches were officially teaching. Once official state sponsorship of atheism ended, one would logically expect reconciliations between and among the divided unions. All of those divisions have persisted. A part of the post-communist story has been the shared mission/evangelism efforts to overcome disunity, or to hold conferences to get to a fuller story of what happened, including apologies and repentance as a way to unity. Among the adherents of divided unions

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<sup>21</sup> The official name of the organisation: All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB).

whose members had managed to emigrate to Germany, or to America, those divisions usually persisted, even if individual members returned to fellowship.

What we have just reviewed points to a persistence of church division in settings of oppression. The fact that easing of oppression, or its official ending, so seldom has resulted in reconciliation and renewal, is troubling. Does that striving for purity of faith justify the divisions during times of strong oppression, and does it justify it in changed situations? Perhaps it is more accurate to say it explains the differences.

### **Agendas to Pursue for Integrity of Witness**

The new century served to draw attention to the ‘changing face of Europe’. One of the new challenges was the deepened awareness of the ethnic minorities that became more visible, and new groups of asylum seekers and migrants. In June 2006 the EBF hosted a conference on *Ethnic Churches in Europe – A Baptist Response*.<sup>22</sup> The published essays are a good reminder of the complex set of issues that ‘ethnic’ label evoked. Paul Weller’s keynote address worked its way through nearly a dozen sub-topics. Weller ended by citing Jürgen Moltmann’s observation that the future shape of Christianity is ‘inevitably becoming that of a believers’ church’, and therefore raising ecclesiological, theological and missiological issues to consider carefully. Those challenges have only increased, for they are global in nature, not merely European.

Recently a reviewer introduced a new word in a Muslim versus Buddhist context for South Asia, but clearly relevant globally. It is the word ‘majoritarianism’.<sup>23</sup> The book reviewer described efforts in numerous regions by troubled governments, usually conservative, to enforce majoritarianism. It meant treating the majority population of a country as the desired norm, with religious minorities treated as second class, or, as in the case of the Rohingya in Myanmar, as undesirable, forced by violence to flee to Bangladesh or suffering mass killing. By the time of the more restrictive law on religion of 1997 in Russia, it too spoke of ‘historic’ religions – naming Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism – versus the new religions that needed to justify their legal registration on the basis of a minimum size of local society. In the Central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union, the variety of Protestant, Catholic, and other newer denominations were soon under more oppressive controls. Over the past decade the weekly reports from *Forum 18* are invariably full of outright violations of religious freedoms in those Central

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<sup>22</sup> Peter F. Penner, ed., *Ethnic Churches in Europe. A Baptist Response* (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Mukul Kesavan, ‘Murderous Majorities’, *New York Review of Books* (18 January 2018), pp. 37-40.

Asian states, as well as in specific Russian oblasts. Russia itself banned the Jehovah's Witness church in 2017, a shocking and incomprehensible action. These are illustrations of majoritarian thinking, sending fear signals to religious minorities by banning one of the smaller religious minorities.

World public opinion, which once was attentive to such religious rights violations, has also been changing. Since the 11 September 2001 attack on the twin towers in New York city, followed by the Bush administration's war on Iraq and Afghanistan and widespread use of 'enhanced interrogation methods', American forces required landing rights in those neighbouring Central Asian states, and America overlooked their hosts' mistreatment of peoples. It has meant that the voices of non-governmental organisations from America have been more muted. More deliberate international Christian coalitions for solidarity and for assistance to the oppressed are now needed, even as those same organisations need to awaken the consciences of a too poorly informed public.

Why these indicators of the waning of social compassion? My response is that we will need a deeper grasp of global inter-linkages. President George W. Bush, unaware of the record of abuses by the American military presence globally, spoke often about fostering democracy, yet as part of the sudden sense of threat to America, the Bush-Cheney administration began engaging in torture of captured prisoners. Bush's advisers began speaking of the international laws on warfare as outmoded, or as limiting the sovereignty of America. So, in spite of the numerous instances where the European court of justice challenged the legitimacy of treatment of prisoners of conscience in Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, and even Kazakhstan, the governments of those countries ignored such international norms, as did the Americans.

Human rights historian Samuel Moyn<sup>24</sup> drew attention to what has been changing since 1991, moving away from forms of socialism in favour of market capitalism. French economist Thomas Piketty's wide-ranging statistical depiction of the worsening reality of the nearly inconceivable gap between the poor and the super-rich, became a major theme for historians and economists.<sup>25</sup> This focus on human rights (including religious rights) as worthy of major global attention, so Moyn now argues, caused observers to miss a major shift in correlations. When the United Nations Human Rights declaration was approved in 1948, it very explicitly linked human rights to social and economic justice. By 2018, unfortunately, it has become obvious

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<sup>24</sup> Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018). Citing from an excerpt: Samuel Moyn, 'Human Rights are Not Enough', *The Nation* (9 April 2018), 20-22.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Arthur Goldhammer, tr. e-book, 2015).

that increasingly human rights violations are now correlated to the dramatic decline in the economic strength of a country's middle class.

Another way of decrying the reality now so obvious among economists, is to note the contradictory interpretations of the end of the Cold War: the non-violent or velvet revolutions rejecting corrupt socialist economies in Eastern Europe, and subsequent efforts to rebuild a responsible civil society, versus the way American society and government claim that it had won the Cold War by its massive threat of nuclear arms. That is the victory of redemptive violence thinking. That thinking caused American political leaders to assume singular global leadership in imperial style, most troubling under current evangelical support of President Trump's 'America First' philosophy. It reminds one of the truism that empire thinking has always been the way of death, not of life.

A legitimate, deep, and persistent linkage between evangelicalism and oppression in Eurasia and Eastern Europe today – indeed anywhere globally – must be understood and circumscribed by that Gospel text from John 3.16: Billy Graham's persistent message that God loves everyone and is not willing that any should perish. It must be understood in the light of this message that Christians, recognising the causes of global inequality as rooted in greed, refuse to support and bless policies at the local, national, and global level of political and even religious leaders whose thinking is based on redemptive violence.

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## **‘That the progress of the Word be not hindered’: William Nicolson and the British and Foreign Bible Society in Russia, 1869-1897<sup>1</sup>**

Ian M. Randall

### **Introduction**

In 1897 a Russian reporter in St Petersburg covered the farewell to William Nicolson, who was retiring from his work for the British and Foreign Bible Society. The reporter stated:

Pastor Nicolson arrived at St Petersburg in 1869 as the representative of the Bible Society. His activity is well known here, and in the course of these long years, without sparing his health and strength, he has travelled the length and breadth of Russia to distribute the Holy Scriptures.<sup>2</sup>

Nicolson, said the report, was respected for his ‘highly humanitarian work’.<sup>3</sup> The detailed history of the transdenominational British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) from its beginning in 1804, written early in the twentieth century by William Canton, described the arrival of Nicolson in St Petersburg to assume leadership of BFBS activities across a wide geographical area as heralding a ‘new chapter in Russian Bible history’. Canton notes that in 1869 ‘a native Russian Bible Society was established with the direct sanction of the Czar’.<sup>4</sup> According to Stephen Batalden, in his work on the BFBS in Russia, Nicolson made a crucial contribution to ‘the efficient transformation of the Petersburg agency into a modern Eurasian center for multi-lingual biblical translation and dissemination’.<sup>5</sup> Despite many pressures, which will be examined, the BFBS was able to expand its work. Batalden argues that Nicolson deserves much of the credit for the Society’s position in Russia in the later nineteenth century, and notes he has

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Dr Toivo Pilli, Director of Baptist and Anabaptist Studies at the International Baptist Theological Study Centre, Amsterdam, for the opportunity to present this material at a conference in April 2018.

<sup>2</sup> *The Bible Society Monthly Reporter*, January 1898, pp. 10-11. BSA G1/3/28. BSA references are to the Bible Society archive in Cambridge University Library. I am grateful to Dr Onesimus Ngundu, the Society Librarian, for his help.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> William Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, Vol. III (London: John Murray, 1910), p. 343.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen K. Batalden, ‘The BFBS Petersburg Agency and Russian Biblical Translation, 1856-1875’, in Stephen Batalden, Kathleen Cann and John Dean, *Sowing the Word: The Cultural Impact of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1804–2004* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004), pp. 182-3.



had no published biographical treatment.<sup>6</sup> This examination seeks to begin the process of understanding Nicolson's place in 'Russian Bible history'.

## From Shetland to St Petersburg

William Nicolson was born on 18 October 1827, on the island of Unst, which is the furthest north island of the Shetlands, the most northerly islands of Scotland. He was the eldest of nine children. His father was a merchant seaman. Education in Unst was limited in this period, and one of William's contemporaries, the daughter of the local medical doctor, spoke of William as 'self-taught, self-made'. She continued: 'I remember how our father's bookshelves [Laurence Edmondston, the doctor] were ransacked to provide him [Nicolson] with reading. He had a great gift of languages and our father was amazed at the progress he made.'<sup>7</sup> Laurence Edmondston himself spoke several languages and was evidently impressed by someone whom he saw following in his footsteps.<sup>8</sup> From Shetland, William Nicolson moved to the Edinburgh area, where he worked in a bookseller's business. He became a member of a Congregational church, where George Cullen was minister. Cullen had close links with the Bible Society of Scotland, and so Nicolson was introduced to aspects of Bible Society endeavours. Another minister in the church was William Swan, who from 1818 to 1841 had served with the London Missionary Society in Russia. Swan was one of the translators of the Bible into the Mongolian language.<sup>9</sup> In this period, therefore, Nicolson, then in his early twenties, was hearing about life in Russia.

Perhaps as a result of the preaching of the ministers in his church, Nicolson felt a call to Congregational ministry. He entered the Congregational Theological Academy, Glasgow (later Theological Hall, Edinburgh), in 1854. Alongside the Congregational training, Nicolson was a student at Edinburgh University, gaining an MA. He served for one year in the Congregational church in Peterhead, Scotland, and his first settled pastorate was in the north of England, in Amble, where he remained for ten

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen K. Batalden, 'Colportage and Distribution of Holy Scripture in Late Imperial Russia', in Robert P. Hughes and Irina Paperno, eds., *Russian Culture in Modern Times: Christianity and the Eastern Slavs*, Vol. II (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), p. 88, and p. 92, fn 19.

<sup>7</sup> Jessie M.E. Saxby, 'Stray Notes from Unst', *Shetland Times*, 6 April 1907, p. 5. I am grateful to my sister and her husband, Sylvia and Monty Georgeson, who live in Shetland, for their help.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Stuart Robertson, *Sons and Daughters of Shetland, 1800-1900* (Lerwick: The Shetland Publishing Company, 1991), p. 41. See also J. Laughton Johnston, *Victorians 60 Degrees North: The Story of the Edmondstons and Saxbys of Shetland* (Lerwick: Shetland Times, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> William D. McNaughton, *Early Congregational Independency in Lowland Scotland*, Vol. I (Glasgow: Congregational Federation in Scotland, 2005), pp. 336-337, 585; cf. *Scottish Congregational Magazine*, 1876, p. 626. For more on Swan and his contemporaries in Russia, see Charles R. Bawden, *Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals: The English Missionaries in Siberia* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

years.<sup>10</sup> As well as being a dedicated pastor, Nicolson found time for academic interests. He submitted an essay on ‘Science and the Gospel’ to an Anglican and International Christian Association connected with ethics and science and was awarded a prize of fifty guineas for the best essay.<sup>11</sup> Nicolson also began to explore whether his ability in languages could be put to good effect. In July 1869 the main Committee of the BFBS discussed a letter they had received from Nicolson applying for the post of BFBS Agent in Berlin, where there was a vacancy. His letter outlined grounds which led him to believe he possessed ‘the needful qualifications for such an office’. He spoke of knowing German, French, Danish, Swedish, and Icelandic.<sup>12</sup> The BFBS Committee replied to ask if Nicolson would consider going to Russia, and after several interviews Nicolson was given high recommendations and appointed to the BFBS Agency based in St Petersburg, initially on a trial basis. His position was soon made permanent and his wife, Mary, with their children, moved to Russia.<sup>13</sup>

Prior to Nicolson’s arrival, BFBS activity in St Petersburg had been overseen mainly on a part-time basis by people who had other responsibilities. Some, such as Richard Knill (responsible, 1826-1833), were ministers of the Congregational Chapel in St Petersburg. Others – Archibald Mirrieles (responsible, 1853-1857), William Mirrieles (1857-1865) and Andrew Muir (1860-1869) - were well-connected businessmen. Archibald Mirrieles and Muir were entrepreneurial Scots who moved to St Petersburg and set up the Muir & Mirrieles Trade Company, an import-export business which produced the Central Universal Department Store. Adalbert Eck (1865-1869) was a full-time BFBS agent, and it was when he died suddenly that there was a vacancy, which Nicolson filled.<sup>14</sup> Andrew Muir and William Mirrieles served on a local BFBS Agency Committee in St Petersburg, which gave Nicolson support and guidance. They were also members of the Congregational Chapel (the British and American Chapel), which the Nicolson family joined. Two children came with William and Mary to Russia and four more were born in St Petersburg. The Nicolsons had a house on

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<sup>10</sup> James Ross, *A History of Congregational Independency in Scotland* (Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, 1900), p. 260; *The Story of the Scottish Congregational Theological Hall, 1811-1911* (Edinburgh: Morrison & Gibb, 1911), p. 5; Harry Escott, *A History of Scottish Congregationalism* (Glasgow: Congregational Union of Scotland, 1960), p. 369; William D. McNaughton, *The Scottish Congregational Ministry, 1794-1993* (Glasgow: Congregational Union of Scotland, 1993), p. 120; Annie Phillips, *A Hundred Years of Congregationalism in Amble* (Amble: Congregational Church, 1948), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Prize Essay’, *Newcastle Journal*, 12 January 1870, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 5 July 1869. BSA/B1/60.

<sup>13</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 19 July 1869; 2 August 1869; 4 October 1869; 7 March 1870. BSA/B1/60-61.

<sup>14</sup> Batalden, ‘The BFBS Petersburg Agency and Russian Biblical Translation, 1856-1875’, pp. 174, 182-3; Stephen K. Batalden, ‘Revolution and Emigration: The Russian Files of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1917-1970’, in Janet Hartley, ed., *The Use of British Archives in the Study of Russian History* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1986), p. 162.

*Vasil'evskii ostrov*, an area (an island) where most of the British business community lived.<sup>15</sup> The 1870 BFBS *Annual Report* noted that Nicolson had settled and was 'showing much diligence in making himself acquainted with the responsibilities of his new office'.<sup>16</sup>

The responsibilities were enormous. Nicolson had oversight of BFBS activity in central Russia, including Moscow, through the valley of the Volga, into Siberia, and in Finland and the Baltic countries. Odessa was a separate centre of BFBS work. The task did not seem daunting, however, to the newly-arrived Nicolson. He wrote letters to the two joint Secretaries of the BFBS in London in late 1869 and early 1870 describing 'excellent prospects as regards the circulation of the Scriptures in this vast Empire'. He anticipated 'a pretty large purchase of Russian Scriptures' from the Holy Synod, the governing body of the Russian Orthodox Church. He had in mind about 15,000 New Testaments and other portions of Scripture.<sup>17</sup> The BFBS had adopted in 1862 the Holy Synod's New Testament translation and the St Petersburg Agency became the Synod's largest purchaser of Scriptures, largely the New Testament, in the last half century of the Russian Empire.<sup>18</sup> Nicolson knew that in order to relate to the Orthodox Church, to translators of Scripture and to BFBS 'colporteurs' who sold the Scriptures, he needed to speak Russian, and with the help of a Russian tutor he gained a command of the language. As early as February 1870 Andrew Muir was able to report to Samuel Bergne, BFBS joint Secretary, about Nicolson's 'conscientiousness and plain dealing', although Muir had also become aware that Nicolson might be 'deficient in tact'.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps in response, Nicolson wrote to Bergne later in 1870 to assure him that 'I shall be the last man to place the Society in an ambiguous position by trespassing knowingly any ordinance of the [Russian] Empire either civil or ecclesiastical'.<sup>20</sup> Nicolson was becoming aware of some of the sensitivities of his position as an Agent of a foreign religious enterprise.

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<sup>15</sup> Marie-Louise Karttunen, 'Making a Communal World: English Merchants in Imperial St Petersburg' (Helsinki: University of Helsinki PhD Thesis, 2004), p. 143. For Muir and Mirrielees, see Harvey Pitcher, *Muir and Mirrielees* (Cromer: Swallow House Books, 1994). See also Thomas Flynn, *The Western Christian Presence in the Russias and Qājār Persia, c.1760–c.1870* (Boston: Brill, 2016), p. 465. Flynn confuses Archibald and William Mirrielees.

<sup>16</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1870, Vol. XXIV p. 104. BSA/G1/1/24.

<sup>17</sup> William Nicolson to Charles Jackson, 23 December 1869, and to Samuel Bergne, 7 January 1870. Agent's Book. BSA D 1/7 No. 125.

<sup>18</sup> Batalden, 'The BFBS Petersburg Agency and Russian Biblical Translation, 1856-1875', pp. 179, 191.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Muir to Samuel Bergne, 17 February 1870. Agent's Book. BSA D 1/7 No. 125.

<sup>20</sup> William Nicolson to Samuel Bergne, 4 October 1870. Agent's Book. BSA D 1/7 No. 137.

## Part of a ‘Great Drama’

As Nicolson settled into his role in St Petersburg, he was concerned about misconceptions in Britain regarding Russia. Nicolson noted that there had been an article in *The Scotsman* newspaper in October 1869, and picked up by other British newspapers, headed ‘Expulsion of the Bible from Russia’. The author gave the impression that the Russian government was putting obstacles in the way of the BFBS and Nicolson believed such a negative perception could hinder BFBS work.<sup>21</sup> The article accepted that Bibles were being published in Russia, but stated that the BFBS was not to be allowed to introduce Bibles into Russia ‘because the right of publishing the Bible for the use of the Orthodox is enjoyed by the Holy Synod alone’.<sup>22</sup> Nicolson wrote to *The Scotsman* and his letter was published in November 1869. He alleged that the article had ‘put an entirely false colouring on the state of the case’. It was true that the Orthodox Holy Synod possessed in Russia an exclusive right to print the Scriptures. But this, he noted, was similar to the situation that had prevailed until recently in Britain, with certain firms and public bodies having the vested right to print Bibles. The BFBS had been purchasing Scriptures from the Synod for distribution. Nicolson said he would like to see greater freedom, but it was a perversion of the situation to say the Bible had been ‘expelled’ from Russia.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly the monopoly by the Holy Synod was a limitation. A BFBS-sponsored translation of the Old Testament into Russian was at an advanced stage as Nicolson took up his post and the text was submitted to a committee of the Holy Synod to seek permission for printing. The Synod had itself been working on an Old Testament translation into Russian. Nicolson considered it ‘a sort of hodge podge between the Hebrew and Septuagint’.<sup>24</sup> But Nicolson was determined to stress the freedom that he was experiencing to do his work. His published BFBS report in 1871 emphasised that the authorities in Russia were ‘well disposed’ and that he had experienced ‘the utmost courtesy from the Holy Synod’. Nicolson also spoke of local co-operation, for example with Bible organisations under Lutheran auspices in Russia and with the Russian Bible Society. These bodies were drawing most of their supplies from the BFBS in St Petersburg at 20% discount. With his interest in languages, Nicolson was eager to place on record that in one year over 90,000 copies of parts of Scripture had been distributed from the St Petersburg depot in about thirty languages.<sup>25</sup> As an indication of his vision,

<sup>21</sup> William Nicolson to Samuel Bergne, 25 September 1869 and 5 Oct 1869, and to Charles Jackson, 20 November 1869. BSA D 1/7 No. 125.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Expulsion of the Bible from Russia’, *The Scotsman*, 11 October 1869, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> William Nicolson to the editor, ‘The Bible in Russia’, *The Scotsman*, 20 November 1869. From St P.

<sup>24</sup> William Nicolson to R.B. Girdlestone, BFBS translation department, 3 December 1870. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 8.

<sup>25</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1871, Vol. XXV, pp. 134-136. BSA/G1/1/25.

he wanted to print 10,000 copies of the New Testament in Estonian.<sup>26</sup> He was to make significant progress with translation into Estonian dialects. Similar optimism was displayed a year later. Having overseen the circulation of 145,000 parts of Scripture, Nicolson concluded his 1872 report by suggesting that Russia was 'destined in God's providence to play some important part in the great drama of the world's history'.<sup>27</sup> The BFBS was part of that drama.

This optimism also characterised Nicolson's letters to the BFBS Secretaries. He wrote:

I have great hopes of doing great things, if the Lord will, in 1872. I think that I see the light of God's Truth dawning upon this great Empire, and if changes go forward as rapidly as they have done for the last 10 years, we may live to see a mighty Reformation.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, he urged 'due caution and circumspection'. He had an aim: 'that the progress of the Word be not hindered'.<sup>29</sup> Nicolson was pleased that he was in touch with some of the Russian aristocracy. Count Modest Korff was buying copies of the gospels from the BFBS in thousands. In some cases, Nicolson was gifting copies, where he felt there was particular need, such as for prisons or hospitals. Korff thanked Nicolson for a gift of 180 New Testaments to be distributed to women 'about to be liberated from prison'. Korff had informed Princess Eugenia Maximilianovna of Oldenburg about the gift, and the Princess, who was active in care for women prisoners, expressed her 'sincere thanks' to the BFBS.<sup>30</sup> Among other early contacts made by Nicolson were Hermann Dalton, pastor of the German Reformed Church in St Petersburg, and Maria G. Peuker, who took an interest in recruiting and training colporteurs, and whom Nicolson described as someone who had 'done much in the way of evangelical effort for St Petersburg'.<sup>31</sup>

Soon Nicolson began to travel more extensively. Within Russia his journeys took in the Volga region and parts of Siberia. In Kazan, for instance, a major centre for eastern Russia, he met with translators and other academics.<sup>32</sup> Nicolson took the view in 1873 that 'in the whole range of the [Bible] Society's operations' there was no country in which developments in its work had equalled that in Russia for 'breadth and rapidity'.<sup>33</sup> Batalden speaks of how the mass publishing of Scripture in Russia, a phenomenon

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<sup>26</sup> Minutes of Committee, 21 August 1871. BSA/B1/64.

<sup>27</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1872, Vol XXVI, pp. 105-7. BSA/G1/1/26.

<sup>28</sup> William Nicolson to Charles Jackson, 19 January 1872. Agent's Book. BSA D 1/7 No. 137.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> William Nicolson to Samuel Bergne, 20 January 1872. Agent's Book. BSA D 1/7 No. 137.

<sup>31</sup> William Nicolson to Charles Jackson, 4 October 1870. Agent's Book. BSA D 1/7 No. 125.

<sup>32</sup> Canton, *History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, Vol. III, pp. 349-50.

<sup>33</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1873, Vol. XXVII, pp. 138-9. BSA/G1/1/27.

which he argues has been largely overlooked, ‘served as a powerful mechanism for the expansion of literacy and popular piety’.<sup>34</sup> Nicolson’s expanding work was connected not only with the spread of literacy in Russia, but also with the advance of the evangelical movement. In April 1874 he reported to the BFBS in London on the preaching in St Petersburg of Lord Radstock, an Englishman who, said Nicolson, was ‘labouring here amongst the Russian nobility with a considerable measure of success’. Count Alexei Bobrinsky, noted Nicolson, was willing to finance distribution of Scriptures.<sup>35</sup> Through Bobrinsky, Russian Minister of Transport at the time, the BFBS also secured free passage on the expanding rail network for colporteurs.<sup>36</sup> A month later Nicolson wrote again about ‘Lord Radstock’s labours’, and ‘the consequent increased attention’ to the Scriptures.<sup>37</sup>

The BFBS-sponsored translation of the whole Bible into Russian was completed by 1874, but permission was not granted for it to be circulated in Russia. The Holy Synod was about to complete its translation, which included the Apocrypha, and in part the embargo on the BFBS translation, which did not include the apocryphal books, was because of dispute about this issue.<sup>38</sup> However, when Grand Duchess Marie, daughter of Emperor Alexander II, married Alfred, son of Queen Victoria, Nicolson was one of a delegation that presented the couple with a special copy of the BFBS edition of the Bible in Russian.<sup>39</sup> Robert Girdlestone, head of the BFBS translation department in London, encouraged Nicolson to use appropriate opportunities to inform visiting dignitaries about the BFBS in Russia, but warned the enthusiastic Nicolson that ‘a wedding is not the time for any lengthy address on Biblical statistics’.<sup>40</sup> On the day after the presentation Nicolson wrote to Girdlestone to reassure him that all had gone well, with the Grand Duchess ‘very much interested’ in the Bible.<sup>41</sup> Nicolson later drafted a memorandum which was presented to Alexander II by A.C. Tait, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and other church leaders, when the Emperor was in England. It stated that the BFBS was aware of the Synodal translation of the Old Testament and that it might seem ‘needless, if not an act of presumption’ for the BFBS to offer its translation. But the memorandum expressed the belief that the BFBS’s contribution would be ‘a boon and a blessing’. Mention was

<sup>34</sup> Batalden, ‘Colportage and Distribution of Holy Scripture in Late Imperial Russia’, pp. 83, 85.

<sup>35</sup> William Nicolson to Samuel Bergne, 24 April 1874. BSA D 1/7 No. 149. For more on this see Edmund Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy, 1860-1900* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970).

<sup>36</sup> Batalden, ‘Colportage and Distribution of Holy Scripture in Late Imperial Russia’, p. 85.

<sup>37</sup> William Nicolson to R.B. Girdlestone, 21 May 1874. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 10.

<sup>38</sup> William Kean, *The Bible in Russia* (London: BFBS Centenary Pamphlets, No. VII, 1904), pp. 12-13.

<sup>39</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1874, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 82-3. BSA/G1/1/28.

<sup>40</sup> R.B. Girdlestone to William Nicolson, 6 January 1874. BSA E3/2/4. In 1877 Girdlestone became the first Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford.

<sup>41</sup> William Nicolson to R.B. Girdlestone, 29 January 1874. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 10.

made of the fact that the BFBS was circulating over 350,000 copies of the Scriptures in the Russian Empire.<sup>42</sup>

## Conflicting Convictions

It did seem in the second half of the 1870s that religious toleration was increasing in Russia. An item appeared in *The Scotsman* which suggested the influence of Nicolson. It reported:

Lord Radstock conducted services during the spring in the English Congregational Chapel in St Petersburg, and in connection with these there was indicated an amount of religious toleration in high circles which was unexpected, and bids fair for more extended religious toleration.<sup>43</sup>

In February 1875 Nicolson wrote to Samuel Bergne to say that the Holy Synod had again ruled that the BFBS translation of the Old Testament was not going to be allowed to be distributed in Russia. Nicolson advised Bergne not to be too optimistic about any change as 'the Synod and the [Orthodox] Priesthood are very strong' and the Emperor was not known to move 'against these powers'.<sup>44</sup> It was against this background that Nicolson asked advice from Bergne about a request from the very wealthy Colonel Vasily Pashkov, an aide-de-camp of the Emperor, who had embraced evangelical spirituality through Radstock. Pashkov had told Nicolson that he hoped there could be a printing of parts of the New Testament with 'the verses which refer to the method of salvation underlined in red'. Nicolson wondered if the BFBS would want their colporteurs distributing those.<sup>45</sup> The question was discussed in the BFBS Editorial Committee in London. They concluded they could not support Pashkov's scheme.<sup>46</sup> Girdlestone wrote to Nicolson to ask him to decline Pashkov's suggestion 'with every mark of respect'.<sup>47</sup> A core conviction of the BFBS was that Bibles must be without additional note or comment. This was seen to include underlining.

Nicolson hoped to reconcile differing convictions, but this was not easy. He wrote to the BFBS Secretaries in April 1876 to report that Count Korff had been to see him and had argued that BFBS should buy the Synod's version of the whole Bible. Nicolson was not convinced.<sup>48</sup> The BFBS Editorial Committee discussed Nicolson's letter. The Synod's version, with

<sup>42</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1875, Vol. XXIX, pp. 102-3. BSA/G1/1/29.

<sup>43</sup> 'Russia', *The Scotsman*, 14 July 1874, p. 2. For a wider discussion, see Paul W. Werth, *The Tsar's Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> William Nicolson to Samuel Bergne, 10 February 1875, BSA E3 1 /4, No. 11. Canton, Vol. III, pp. 347-8.

<sup>45</sup> William Nicolson to Samuel Bergne, 23 March 1875. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Minutes of a Meeting of the Editorial Sub-Committee, 31 March 1875. BSA C17/1/11.

<sup>47</sup> R.B. Girdlestone to William Nicolson, 8 April 1875. BSA E3/2/4.

<sup>48</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 5 April 1876. BSA E3 1 /4, No. 12.

the Apocrypha, was described in Russian official circles as ‘more adapted to the requirements of Orthodox Russians’.<sup>49</sup> This apparent set-back for the BFBS was included in its 1877 *Report*.<sup>50</sup> The result was that emphasis continued to be placed by Nicolson on distributing the Synodal New Testament. Despite the disagreement with Colonel Pashkov over underlining texts, Nicolson was in close touch with him, as the Pashkov circle was involved in large-scale evangelistic and social endeavours.<sup>51</sup> Nicolson reported in 1877 on the Society for the Encouragement of Moral and Religious Reading, established in the previous year with Pashkov as President, to circulate Scriptures, books, and tracts. The BFBS was offering Pashkov a substantial discount on Scriptures and Nicolson hoped the Society ‘might do something towards solving the great unsolved problem of Bible work in Russia’ – reaching the widely-scattered ‘mass of the people’.<sup>52</sup> Heier saw in the Society unparalleled potential for religious and ethical change.<sup>53</sup>

Over the course of several months in 1877-78 Nicolson wrestled with what to do about the restrictions placed on him by the Holy Synod. His hope was that a version of the Synodal Bible without the Apocrypha could be printed by the Synod.<sup>54</sup> He was also keen to find out what Russian scholars of Hebrew had to say about the Synod’s translation and he reported to the BFBS Secretaries in January 1878 about a scholarly article on this in the *Orthodox Review*. The author, Mikhail Nicolsky, compared the BFBS Russian version of the Old Testament with the Synod’s version. The article was severely critical of the BFBS version and in the light of this Nicolson suggested significant revision might be needed. However, the article also suggested the Synodal version was no better.<sup>55</sup> Nicolson translated the article into English and passed it to the BFBS Editorial Committee.<sup>56</sup> In the meantime Nicolson was receiving sometimes contradictory advice from his St Petersburg circle. Count Korff continued to be in favour of simply buying the Synod’s version, but Nicolson told the BFBS Secretaries in May 1878 that Korff, while ‘earnest and eager as to the furtherance of God’s work’, did not always combine ‘the necessary judgment with eagerness’. In the same month Radstock spoke what he understood was a tentative offer by the Synod

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<sup>49</sup> Minutes of a Meeting of the Editorial Sub-Committee, 31 May 1876. BSA C17/1/12.

<sup>50</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1876, Vol. XXX, p. 77. BSA/G1/1/30.

<sup>51</sup> See Sharyl Corrado, ‘The Gospel in Society: Pashkovite Social Outreach in Late Imperial Russia’, in S. Corrado and Toivo Pilli, eds., *Eastern European Baptist History: New Perspectives* (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), pp. 52-70.

<sup>52</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1877, Vol. XXXI, p. 109. BSA/G1/1/31.

<sup>53</sup> Heier, *Religious Schism in the Russian Aristocracy*, p. 118.

<sup>54</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 20 September 1877; 8 January 1878. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 13.

<sup>55</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 31 January 1878. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 14.

<sup>56</sup> Minutes of a Meeting of the Editorial Sub-Committee, 6 March 1878. BSA C17/1/12.



to print the Bible without the Apocrypha and hoped the BFBS would quickly act on this 'as the offer may soon be withdrawn'.<sup>57</sup>

During the summer of 1878 Nicolson was seeking to make direct contact with Nicolsky, the author of article in the *Orthodox Review*.<sup>58</sup> Nicolson had ascertained that Nicolsky, who was a Professor at the Orthodox Moscow Theological Academy, was well acquainted with Hebrew and Syriac. Contact was made, and Radstock was enthusiastic about the possibilities, but Nicolson felt too much British evangelical involvement might be a hindrance. However, Nicolson was disappointed that it seemed no-one at the BFBS in London saw the significance of the article.<sup>59</sup> The Moscow Theological Academy, especially under the influence of Professor Kudriavtsev, was significant in this period for its commitment to 'enlightened' Orthodox theological education.<sup>60</sup> As Batalden notes, on more than one occasion Nicolson was frustrated by the inability of the London BFBS office to understand the Russian context.<sup>61</sup> In this case, as well as their apparent failure to take an interest in Nicolson's connections in the academic community, those in London seemed to have little understanding of the power of the Holy Synod. There had been a suggestion from London that Nicolson could explore the possibility of a joint revision of the Russian Old Testament by the BFBS and the Synod. Nicolson explained that the Synod was a government ministry and had no interest in a joint venture with the BFBS. Also, the possibilities for dialogue were threatened by political tensions, with what Nicolson called 'the Slavophiles here' and 'the Jingoists in Britain' intent on bringing Russia and Britain 'into a white heat of mutual hostility'. He agreed, however, that he would make enquiries with government officials. He was aware that Maria Peuker had a nephew who was assistant Minister of Public Instruction.<sup>62</sup>

While these debates were going on at a higher level, Nicolson was also overseeing the work of the colporteurs in Russia, Finland, and the Baltic countries. He had been able to open a full-scale BFBS depot in Moscow. Mariia Andreeva was perhaps the best known of those who sold Scriptures there. During one visit, Nicolson had an interview with the Moscow Military

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<sup>57</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 15 May 1878; 20 May 1878. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 14; Minutes of the Committee, 29 May 1878. BSA/B1/72.

<sup>58</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 12 June 1878, 17 July 1878. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 14. Minutes of a Meeting of the Editorial Sub-Committee, 26 June 1878, 31 July. BSA C17/1/13.

<sup>59</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 30 August 1878; 16 September 1878; 21 November 1878. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 14.

<sup>60</sup> Sean Gillen, 'V. D. Kudriavtsev-Platonov and the Making of Russian Orthodox Theism', in Patrick Michelson and Judith Kornblatt, eds., *Thinking Orthodox in Modern Russia: Culture, History, Context* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2014), p. 111.

<sup>61</sup> Batalden, 'The BFBS Petersburg Agency and Russian Biblical Translation, 1856-1875', p. 194.

<sup>62</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 21 November 1878. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 14. Minutes of a Meeting of the Editorial Sub-Committee, 27 November 1878. BSA C17/1/13.

Governor, who said he wanted several thousand copies of Scriptures for his men.<sup>63</sup> There had been a tradition of colportage in Russian villages, but Nicolson also wanted to reach industrial sites. These could be challenging: one colporteur went to a large cloth mill near Moscow and had to respond to workmen who said: ‘Why do you bring your books here? Bring us rather a large cask of brandy, which we would soon drink, and you should be paid.’<sup>64</sup> On occasions Nicolson had to draw on influential friends where there were serious difficulties. The governor of Tula refused BFBS colportage because of the circulation of ‘publications of a socialist or revolutionary character’. In this case Count Bobrinsky was asked by Nicolson to intervene.<sup>65</sup> Others who were involved in Scripture distribution included Princess Natalie Lieven and Henry Lansdell, an Anglican clergyman who became well known for his adventurous travels. He went to hospitals and convict settlements across Russia (especially Siberia) and distributed Scriptures. Nicolson was eager for the BFBS to give grants for these activities.<sup>66</sup> At the end of the 1870s, despite conflicting convictions on some issues, BFBS work in Russia seemed to be steadily advancing. Major opposition was, however, in store.

## Responding to Orthodox Opposition

The opposition was principally led by Konstantin Pobedonostsev, who became the director, or Ober-Procurator, of the Holy Synod in 1880. He had previously been a lecturer in Moscow University, a tutor to the sons of Emperor Alexander II, both later Emperors, and he became a member of the Russian Council of State. His post in charge of the Holy Synod gave him ‘enormous influence in Russian political life’.<sup>67</sup> The Holy Synod included other Orthodox leaders, but Pobedonostsev’s rule was virtually absolute, especially when (as was the case from 1881 with Alexander III and then Nicholas II), the tsars were open to his philosophy, which embodied a determination to ensure that Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church was preserved from foreign religious ideas.<sup>68</sup> When Pobedonostsev was appointed, Nicolson began to enquire about meeting him. This soon became urgent. Nicolson had received assurance from the Holy Synod about supplying the BFBS with at least 10,000 copies of the Synodal Old

<sup>63</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1878, Vol. XXXII, pp. 85, 88. BSA/G1/1/32.

<sup>64</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1875, Vol. XXIX, pp. 105. BSA/G1/1/29.

<sup>65</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1877, Vol. XXXI, p. 115. BSA/G1/1/31. Bobrinsky was consistently supportive, but because of political sensitivities Nicolson sometimes asked that the Count’s name be kept out of reports.

<sup>66</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1880 Vol. XXXIV, pp. 104, 109. BSA/G1/1/34. Lansdell’s journeys were published in *The Times* in 1880 and he subsequently published a book: Henry Lansdell, *Through Siberia*, 2 vols. (London: Sampson Low, 1882).

<sup>67</sup> Robert F. Byrnes, *Pobedonostsev: His Life and Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 165.

<sup>68</sup> For an evangelical view, see Hans Brandenburg, *The Meek and the Mighty: The Emergence of the Evangelical Movement in Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 114-130.

Testament without the Apocrypha.<sup>69</sup> The BFBS in London, welcoming this decision, appreciated 'the excellent manner in which Mr Nicolson had conducted the negotiations with the Holy Synod'.<sup>70</sup> But when news came through that printing of the Old Testament had been stopped on the orders of Pobedonostsev, Count Korff suggested to Nicolson that an approach be made through the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Shaftesbury, as President of the BFBS, to Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky, the Russian Ambassador in London. Korff also suggested having a reporter from *The Times* present.<sup>71</sup> The intention was to exert a degree of political pressure on the Russian government.

Nicolson was cautious about too public a protest, although he accepted this might be necessary. His preference was quieter diplomacy and he asked for and was given an interview with the Ober-Procurator. Reporting afterwards to the BFBS Secretaries, Nicolson described Pobedonostsev as a 'somewhat sickly looking man'. Pobedonostsev said he spoke little English – which was not the case – and conversation proceeded in Russian. In view of the case Nicolson presented, Pobedonostsev agreed to a single printing of the Synodal Bible without the Apocrypha. He pronounced, however, that it was 'dangerous' to have two versions, and that the version for the BFBS would not have 'with the blessing of the Holy Synod' written on it. There would also be an Appendix which listed the apocryphal books.<sup>72</sup> Nicolson's previous optimism about evangelical advance in Russia gave way to concern. Pashkov's meetings, Nicolson reported in 1880, began to be disrupted by the authorities.<sup>73</sup> In May 1881 there were interruptions in printing the Old Testament for the BFBS. Alexander II, who had supported the BFBS, had been assassinated two months previously. Nicolson wrote to the BFBS Secretaries to say there was a complete political reaction and the 'Philo-Slavs and Old Russia Party appear for the moment triumphant', with Orthodox Church leaders taking the view: 'right or wrong, what is national must be upheld'. He hoped the 'stupidity of this party' would 'bring them to grief'. He was now open to approaching the Russian ambassador.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Minutes of a Meeting of the Editorial Sub-Committee, 8 January 1879; 2 April 1879. BSA C17/1/13. Pashkov had hoped for 20,000 copies and this had been a possibility: Minutes of Committee, 26 May 1879. BSA/B1/73.

<sup>70</sup> Minutes of a Meeting of the Editorial Sub-Committee, 17 September 1879. BSA C17/1/14.

<sup>71</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 18 September 1880. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 15. Minutes of the Committee, 20 September 1880. BSA/B1/60.

<sup>72</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 16 October 1880. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 15. Minutes of the Committee, 18 October 1880; 1 November 1880. BSA/B1/75.

<sup>73</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1879, Vol. XXXIII, pp. 91-2. BSA/G1/1/33; Minutes of the Committee, 21 June 1880. BSA/B1/75.

<sup>74</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 23 May 1881. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 16. Minutes of a Meeting of the Editorial Sub-Committee, 1 June 1881. BSA C17/1/14; Minutes of the Committee, 4 July 1881. BSA/B1/76. BFBS *Annual Report*, 1881 Vol. XXXV, pp. 82, 86. BSA/G1/1/35.

Over the course of the next four years, Nicolson had various meetings with Pobedonostsev and also with Count Tolstoi, the Minister of the Interior. In May 1882, after an interview with the Ober-Procurator, Nicolson stated that the printing of the Bible for the BFBS would go ahead. He remarked that there was benefit in ‘obstinate hoping and waiting’.<sup>75</sup> The Committee in London thanked the St Petersburg BFBS Agency Committee, one of whose members was J.W. Foster, the American Ambassador to Russia, and especially Nicolson for his ‘patience and skill’ in the ‘protracted negotiations’.<sup>76</sup> By 1883 Nicolson was happy to report that the Bible which had been promised was printed and was being sold. It is clear that in his dealing with the Holy Synod Nicolson was receiving strong back-up from the BFBS Committee in St Petersburg.<sup>77</sup> In this period Nicolson was also seeking to make continued progress with translations into other languages spoken in the area for which he had responsibility. Nicolson began Arabic studies and hoped to print the Tatar Four Gospels in Arabic script. However, Nicolson’s contact, Nikolai Il’minskii, the leading specialist in Arabic and the Turkic languages (who was influential in the Theological Academy and the University at Kazan), was becoming more committed to using the Cyrillic script.<sup>78</sup> There were parallel problems in Lithuania about whether the BFBS should use the Latin script, favoured by Catholics in Lithuania, or the Cyrillic, favoured by Orthodoxy.<sup>79</sup>

In July 1882 Nicolson had an interview with Count Tolstoi to ask about setting up a new BFBS depot in Tashkent, and the Count gave his assurance that he would do what he could to further this project.<sup>80</sup> The pioneer of this move was Johann Bartsch, who emigrated with fellow Mennonites to Turkestan. He was a colporteur and when he joined the Mennonite ‘great trek’ he resigned from BFBS work in Saratov, which was a great loss to that region, but as a result of the move he and his brother Franz developed Tashkent as an important BFBS centre.<sup>81</sup> In 1883 Nicolson reported after visiting Tashkent that the BFBS premises were excellent.<sup>82</sup> Nicolson was also pleased in the same year to welcome two representatives

<sup>75</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 14 September 1882. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 17.

<sup>76</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 8 May 1882; 22 May 1882. BSA/B1/77. Minutes of Editorial Sub-Committee, 18 October 1882. BSA C/17/1/15.

<sup>77</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1883 Vol. XXXVII, pp. 96-7, 100. BSA/G1/1/37.

<sup>78</sup> Alison Ruth Kolosova, *Narodnost` and Obshchechelovechnost` in 19th century Russian missionary work: N.I.Il'minskii and the Christianization of the Chuvash* (2016), p. 169. Durham theses, Durham University, available at Durham E-Theses Online: <<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11403/>> For Nicolson, see pp. 166-73.

<sup>79</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1882 Vol. XXXVI, p. 128. BSA/G1/1/36. William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 14 November 1883. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 18.

<sup>80</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 17 July 1882. BSA/B1/77.

<sup>81</sup> Canton, *History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, Vol. III, pp. 354-5. See Fred Richard Belk, *The Great Trek of the Russian Mennonites to Central Asia 1880-1884* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1976).

<sup>82</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1883 Vol. XXXVII, pp. 108-9. BSA/G1/1/37.

from the BFBS in London, John Sharp, an Anglican clergyman, and F.J. Wood, a lawyer. Sharp had become a BFBS Secretary, having been a missionary in India and then a lecturer in Telugu and Tamil at the University of Cambridge. Nicolson made sure that they saw a range of BFBS activities in St Petersburg, Moscow, and other cities. He also took them to Orthodox services, where they were struck by 'the reverent prominence given to the Holy Scriptures' and by the message of the Bible presented through 'pictures and frescoes'. Nicolson arranged meetings with Orthodox leaders, including a meeting at the Holy Synod. Sharp and Wood spoke of being 'well received by representatives of the Orthodox Church', some of whom 'manifested considerable acquaintance with English theological books, and a large-hearted spirit of Christian tolerance'.<sup>83</sup>

Within the course of the next few months any semblance of 'large-hearted spirit' had disappeared. In April 1884 Pashkov and Korff hosted a conference in St Petersburg which brought together evangelicals from different parts of Russia. It was, however, almost immediately suppressed. Pashkov and Korff were exiled. They had been told that they must sign an undertaking not to preach or to organise meetings, and must cut off contact with religious communities seen as sectarian. This they refused to do.<sup>84</sup> The fear on the part of Pobedonostsev was that the social and evangelistic activities of the Pashkov circles, including popular literature being distributed, for example *The Russian Workman* (edited by Maria Peuker and later her daughter Alexandra), would lead people to question the established order and in particular Orthodox allegiance.<sup>85</sup> Just before these events, Nicolson was quite outspoken in a letter to London: 'I am not disposed to sit in harmony with the iniquitous conduct of the Russian government in keeping the poor people in ignorance and degradation.'<sup>86</sup> However, in his public statements he continued to seek to be positive. In his 1884 BFBS Report he spoke of the way the Russian people as a whole were receptive to the Scriptures and emphasised that the BFBS was working with Orthodox missionaries on Scripture distribution.<sup>87</sup> An Orthodox group, the Brotherhood of St Gurii, was involved in translation and distribution of Scriptures. Nikolai Il'minskii, who directed their translation committee, wanted an alternative to the BFBS.<sup>88</sup> But Nicolson's aim was to seek common ground with faith as expressed in Russia.

<sup>83</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1884, Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 110-11. BSA/G1/1/38-

<sup>84</sup> Brandenburg, *The Meek and The Mighty*, pp. 112-13. See also R.S. Latimer, *Under Three Tsars: Liberty of Conscience in Russia, 1856-1909* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1909), pp. 134-40.

<sup>85</sup> Corrado, 'The Gospel in Society', p. 68.

<sup>86</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 11 March 1884. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 18.

<sup>87</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1884, Vol. XXXVIII, pp. 109-111. BSA/G1/1/38-

<sup>88</sup> Kolosova, *Narodnost' and Obshchechelovechnost' in 19th century Russian missionary work*, p. 361.

## The Scriptures Alone

In June 1885 Nicolson had an interview with Pobedonostsev in which the Ober-Procurator made clear that there would be no further printing of the Old Testament without the Apocrypha.<sup>89</sup> A year later Nicolson held out no hope for change as long as Pobedonostsev was in office.<sup>90</sup> The good news in 1885-86 was that a printing of 100,000 copies of the New Testament which Nicolson had ordered had sold out and it had been agreed by the Holy Synod that a further 100,000 would be printed.<sup>91</sup> By now Nicolson had nineteen colporteurs working for him in Russia and a new and larger warehouse and offices for the BFBS in St Petersburg had to be found. The new premises were near the great Cathedral of St Isaac. But the background was one of growing suspicion, with the government, as Nicolson reported in 1886, taking the view that the BFBS was ‘aiding the evangelical movement’ and that its colporteurs ‘circulate tracts along with the Scriptures’.<sup>92</sup> In various parts of Eastern Europe colporteurs were doing precisely this, despite such activity being contrary to BFBS policy.<sup>93</sup> Nicolson could see that there was the possibility of the BFBS work being stopped completely. After an interview with the police inspector in St Petersburg he argued that the BFBS ‘Scripture alone’ rule should be given more prominence. In his eighteen years in Russia he had not previously seen the level of hostility that now existed within the Orthodox Church to the Protestant movements.<sup>94</sup> In response, the BFBS in London urged Nicolson to keep open the channels of communication with the Synod. William Wright, editorial superintendent, said to Nicolson in October 1886: ‘We have much faith in your tact and diplomacy.’<sup>95</sup>

From this point on, for the remaining ten years in which he was in Russia, Nicolson was continually aware of the need to distinguish the BFBS from religious movements which seemed to challenge Orthodoxy. In December 1886 he wrote to the BFBS Secretaries in London about how Pobedonostsev, was ‘waging a fierce warfare with the Protestant sects of South Russia’ and was accusing the BFBS of being ‘aiders and abettors of those same sects’.<sup>96</sup> On occasions colporteurs in Russia were dismissed by the BFBS for failing to adhere to the Society’s policies. Ivan Zhidkov, for example, was dismissed in 1885 for seeking to evangelise and spread Baptist

<sup>89</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 15 June 1885. BSA/B1/81.

<sup>90</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 28 September 1886. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 21.

<sup>91</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1886, Vol. XL, p. 116. BSA/G1/1/40.

<sup>92</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 7 June 1886. BSA/B1/82.

<sup>93</sup> See I.M. Randall, ‘Nineteenth-Century Bible Society Colporteurs in Eastern Europe’, *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (May 2012), 5-25.

<sup>94</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 7 June 1886. BSA/B1/82.

<sup>95</sup> William Wright to William Nicolson, 21 October 1886. BSA E3/2/8.

<sup>96</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 31 December 1886. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 22.

convictions.<sup>97</sup> In some regions in which Nicolson was involved there was much less pressure. Considerable freedom was enjoyed by the six BFBS colporteurs in the Baltic region. There were variations, too, across Russia. In Omsk the local governor – whose wife spoke fluent English and was interested in the BFBS – agreed that a new BFBS depot could be opened. But in the Tula region some BFBS colporteurs, as Nicolson reported in 1887, were ‘driven to despair’ by persistent refusals to grant the licences. Some had ‘migrated elsewhere’.<sup>98</sup> Possible options for fresh initiatives by the BFBS were raised with Nicolson in correspondence from London, but Nicolson took the view that independent action would reduce the authority of the BFBS in Russia to ‘zero’. The society was, he insisted, ‘well within the stroke of the Bear’s paw’.<sup>99</sup>

The circulation of Scriptures through Nicolson’s colporteurs was the largest it had ever been in 1889, at 311,000 copies.<sup>100</sup> This was achieved against a background of threats by Pobedonostsev, in meetings he had with Nicolson, to introduce new rules as a way of further ‘regulating’ colporteurs.<sup>101</sup> William Wright wondered whether ‘the prospect of considerable sums of British gold flowing into the coffers of the Holy Synod’, as Scriptures were purchased by the BFBS, might assist Nicolson in his discussions with Pobedonostsev.<sup>102</sup> This showed a misunderstanding of Pobedonostsev’s outlook: he was driven by principles in which he believed, not by pragmatism. In a further interview Nicolson had with Pobedonostsev in early 1890, it was clear that every move by the BFBS was being watched. Pobedonostsev insisted that preaching was taking place under BFBS auspices; Nicolson replied that ‘colporteurs did not teach but simply circulated the Scriptures’. The atmosphere was such that Nicolson asked the BFBS Home Committee to abandon unrealistic expectations. He hoped the committee would ‘give me credit that I know the difference between the practicable and the impracticable in the circumstances in which I am placed’.<sup>103</sup> The degree of caution Nicolson felt to be needed was indicated in 1890 by his response to requests for Scriptures from F.W. Baedeker, an evangelical from England who travelled widely in Russia, with government approval, distributing Scriptures in prisons. The BFBS had been happy to cooperate with him and also with a Russian evangelical, Ivan Kargel.<sup>104</sup> But

<sup>97</sup> Batalden, ‘Colportage and Distribution of Holy Scripture in Late Imperial Russia’, p. 87.

<sup>98</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1887, Vol. XLI, pp. 125-6. BSA/G1/1/41.

<sup>99</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 15 April 1887. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 22.

<sup>100</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1890, Vol. XLIV, p. 93. BSA/G1/1/44.

<sup>101</sup> Minutes of Committee, 13 August 1888; 19 November 1888. BSA/B1/86.

<sup>102</sup> William Wright to William Nicolson, 21 November 1889. BSA E3/2/9.

<sup>103</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 1 April 1890. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 26.

<sup>104</sup> Minutes of Special Sub-Committee, 24 October 1889. BSA C/1/2/3. For Baedeker see R.S. Latimer, *Dr Baedeker and his Apostolic Work in Russia* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1907); for Kargel see G.L. Nichols, *The Development of Russian Evangelical Spirituality: A Study of Ivan V. Kargel (1849-1937)* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

in 1890 Nicolson was worried that Baedeker was known as ‘an earnest evangelical propagandist’ and that too close an association with him might harm the BFBS.<sup>105</sup>

By the 1890s Nicolson was a well-known and respected figure in religious circles in St Petersburg and far beyond. In 1890 he completed a PhD through the University of Helsinki and this was published in 1892.<sup>106</sup> He had built up the St Petersburg BFBS team to six people. In addition, one of his daughters was assisting him. Nicolson reported in 1891 on an edition of the Russian New Testament available from the Synod. It contained forty-one references to the Apocrypha in added notes and his daughter had prepared a tabulation showing the character of each.<sup>107</sup> More widely, features associated with Nicolson’s work included his efficient management of colporteurs and BFBS finances, his extensive travels through which he fostered relationships, his prolific correspondence, his knowledge of the academic world in relation to translation and translators, and his sensitivity to the position of Orthodoxy. The relationship between the BFBS and Orthodoxy was raised at an All-Russian Orthodox Missionary Conference in Moscow in 1891, with Nicolson reporting his concern that it had been stated there that all BFBS colporteurs were Baptists, when in reality this was so with only a few. Some conference delegates wanted to ban the BFBS from Russia. Others said all colporteurs should be Orthodox and licenced by local priests. There were no firm conclusions on some points, but recommendations were for increasingly repressive measures.<sup>108</sup> To try to clarify matters, Nicolson had yet another interview with Pobedonostsev, who was himself under pressure because of misconceptions he had fostered about Protestantism. These had recently been challenged effectively by Hermann Dalton.<sup>109</sup> Nicolson was willing to take seriously any evidence that individual colporteurs were intentionally undermining Orthodox life.<sup>110</sup> He spoke warmly in 1896 of some of the missionaries of the Orthodox Missionary Society.<sup>111</sup>

In a number of areas Nicolson saw continued advance in the years up to his retirement in 1897. The BFBS Report which he wrote in 1894 stated

<sup>105</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 2 June 1890. BSA/B1/87.

<sup>106</sup> William Wright to William Nicolson, 20 June 1893. BSA E3/2/11. The PhD was published: William Nicolson, *Myth and Religion* (Helsinki: Press of the Finnish Literary Society, 1892).

<sup>107</sup> Minutes of Editorial Sub-Committee, 25 February 189. BSA C/17/1/20.

<sup>108</sup> Nicolson to Directors, 10 August 1891. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 28. Albert W. Wardin, *On the Edge: Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855-1917* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2013), p. 211.

<sup>109</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 5 October 1891. BSA/B1/89. See Hermann Dalton, *On Religious Liberty in Russia* (London: Asher & Co, 1890). This was an open letter to Pobedonostsev, published in three languages.

<sup>110</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 16 September 1895. BSA/B1/94.

<sup>111</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 9 October 1896. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 35.



that the BFBS in Russia had purchased over half a million copies of the Scriptures from the Synod in 1893.<sup>112</sup> A year later he was surprised in a conversation with Professor Troitsky, who was Russian Orthodox and Professor of Hebrew in St Petersburg University, to be told that the BFBS Russian translation of the Old Testament was 'decidedly better than the Synod's, less wordy, simpler, and more idiomatic'.<sup>113</sup> This encouraged Nicolson in his involvement in fostering good translations. He noted in 1896 that his Agency was by then distributing Scriptures in 72 languages and dialects.<sup>114</sup> Among these, Nicolson made a substantial contribution to Turkic translation work: in the Volga region, for example, a translation of the gospels into Chuvash was issued in 1895 as a result of Nicolson's cooperation with Ivan Iakovlev, a prominent Chuvash teacher and Bible translator.<sup>115</sup> At the farewell to Nicolson and his family in 1897, held in the British and American Congregational Church, the large audience present heard various speeches, including from Alexander Francis, pastor of the church and a well-connected figure in St Petersburg, who described the high esteem which Nicolson's 'learning, his courtesy, and his Christian character had won for him from all those with whom he had come into contact'. Nicolson and his family were presented with a beautiful 'silver tea-service of Russian pattern and make', so that they could offer a glass of *tchai* (tea) when entertaining friends in Scotland.<sup>116</sup> In 1898, in recognition of his work in Russia, Nicolson was appointed an honorary governor of the BFBS.<sup>117</sup>

## Conclusion

When William Nicolson arrived in Russia in 1869, he was ready to embrace the challenge of seeking to build on what had been done before in Russia and to initiate significant advance. In a letter to the BFBS Secretaries in London in October 1896, he could report that circulation of Scriptures in Russia had gone from 30,000 in 1869 to 500,000 in 1896.<sup>118</sup> The BFBS saw Russia as having become the most important of the BFBS Agencies, having one-seventh of the world-wide circulation of the Scriptures under the auspices of the BFBS.<sup>119</sup> This growth had taken place against the background of both opportunities and difficulties. Problems intensified with the appointment in

<sup>112</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1894, Vol. XLVIII, p. 103. BSA/G1/1/48.

<sup>113</sup> William Nicolson to BFBS Secretaries, 7 June 1894. BSA E3 1/4 No. 32.

<sup>114</sup> BFBS *Annual Report*, 1896, Vol. L, p. 97. BSA/G1/1/50.

<sup>115</sup> Batalden, 'The BFBS Petersburg Agency and Russian Biblical Translation, 1856-1875', p. 194; Kolosova, *Narodnost' and Obshchechelovechnost' in 19th century Russian missionary work*, pp. 169-72.

<sup>116</sup> 'Retirement of the Rev. Dr. Nicolson', *The Bible Society Monthly Reporter*, January-December 1897, p. 214.

<sup>117</sup> Minutes of the Committee, 28 March 1898. BSA/B1/97.

<sup>118</sup> 'Retirement of the Rev. Dr. Nicolson', *The Bible Society Monthly Reporter*, January-December 1897, pp. 214-15.

<sup>119</sup> *Monthly Reporter*, October 1897, p. 193. BSA G1/3/27.Canton, Vol. V, p. 51.

1880 of Konstantin Pobedonostsev as director of the Holy Synod. Although Nicolson tried hard to achieve a working relationship with Pobedonostsev, his private opinion in 1886 was that if Pobedonostsev were ‘raised to a loftier sphere’ (whatever that meant), the BFBS would find its difficulties disappearing.<sup>120</sup> There was a persistent dilemma for Nicolson. He was sorry Pobedonostsev connected the BFBS with the Protestant and evangelical influences which the Ober-Procurator opposed so strenuously.<sup>121</sup> Yet the BFBS was a product of those influences. Given this tension, Batalden argues that BFBS work in Russia survived only because of the ‘vigorous efforts’ of Nicolson, who consistently sought ‘to disassociate the British and Foreign Bible Society from any proselytising’.<sup>122</sup> The work of the BFBS was distributing Scripture alone. As Nicolson retired, he referred to the Holy Synod and said he had ‘nothing but the most friendly remembrance of his lengthened intercourse with the officers of this great institution’.<sup>123</sup> This was a drastic re-interpretation of history, but it represented something of Nicolson’s aspiration as he sought during his years in Russia to ensure the progress of the Word.

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<sup>120</sup> Nicolson to Directors, 31 December 1886. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 22.

<sup>121</sup> Nicolson to Directors, 15 April 1887. BSA E3 1 /4 No. 22.

<sup>122</sup> Batalden, ‘Colportage and Distribution of Holy Scripture in Late Imperial Russia’, pp. 88, and p. 92, fn 19.

<sup>123</sup> BFBS Report, 1897, Vol. LI, p. 101. BSA/G1/1/51.

## **Czech Baptists and the Habsburg Monarchy: A Story of Hesitant Freedom of Worship (1848-1914)**

Miroslav Franc

### **Introduction**

The Habsburg monarchy and Bohemia saw the dawn of the modern age in the nineteenth century. The transition from the old agrarian society to a modern industrial one affected the area of religion as well, and the birth of Baptist churches became one part of this change. During this complex process, early Czech Baptists experienced a lot of difficulties, which are the topic of the following account.

The religious atmosphere of nineteenth-century Bohemia was the result of the turbulent and chequered development of the country. This development had long historical roots which reached back to medieval times. The late medieval Hussite revolution brought about the ending of the dominance of the Catholic Church in Bohemia and inaugurated religious plurality. However, since 1526, the Catholic dynasty of the Habsburgs had reigned firmly over the country and only temporary political expediency could allow acceptance of the non-Catholic religion. The Counter-Reformation, following the Protestant expansion in Europe in the sixteenth century, totally changed the religious character of Bohemia. The unsuccessful uprising of the nobility of Bohemia against the Habsburgs (1618-1620) and the results of the devastating Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) terminated the religious plurality. Until the end of the eighteenth century, the Catholic confession remained, with minor exceptions, the only allowed form of Christian religion in the region. Protestantism had almost disappeared from the country.

### **The Development of Religious Liberty**

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Habsburgs reshaped the religious face of Bohemia again, surprisingly in the reverse direction. In 1781, Emperor Joseph II issued the Edict of Toleration, which ended 200 years of Catholic dominance and legalised two main Protestant religions – Lutheran and Reformed. However, the impact of the edict on Bohemia was quantitatively not impressive. The number of people who went over to the tolerated Protestant confessions in Bohemia and Moravia did not exceed 50,000 until the end of 1782. Twelve Lutheran and thirty-eight Reformed

churches were established in Bohemia. Further numerical development in the membership of both churches remained restricted.<sup>1</sup>

The Edict of Toleration did not change the religious face of Bohemia. The country remained prevailingly Catholic and, although the Baroque Catholic zeal of the Viennese court had largely faded, the common people from villages and small towns in Bohemia remained deeply embedded in the Baroque Catholic world order.<sup>2</sup> As Zdeněk Nešpor, an expert in European cultural history, wrote, ‘the majority of Czechs entered the era of the long 19<sup>th</sup> century as convinced Roman Catholics, and according to testimony of foreign observers even bigoted.’<sup>3</sup> This bigotry influenced the character of society and the lives of non-Catholic Christians. When the rise of industry stimulated urban development, young people especially migrated into cities to find freedom and to escape the supervision of family and village society.<sup>4</sup> Besides this, Protestants also experienced a variety of pressures. There emerged hostile and sometimes even violent behaviour on the part of the Catholic majority towards the tolerated religious minority, including towards Baptists in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The revolution of 1848 brought the fall of the absolutist regime with its limited religious plurality. Discriminating issues of the Edict of Toleration were eliminated; Lutheran and Reformed Churches were granted equal rights with Roman Catholics. The post-revolutionary decade of neo-absolutism did not change the improved religious freedom, but the Habsburgs signed a Concordat with the Roman Catholic church, which strengthened its position in society. When the obsolete neo-absolutist regime fell in 1859, the Habsburg monarchy and Bohemia experienced a radical shift towards modern industrial society, which significantly affected the area of religion as well. The monarchy turned into the secular state, which preferred cooperation with churches based on the principle of parity.<sup>5</sup> This new regime enabled the birth and development of Baptist congregations and other independent churches, although not without obstacles.

The legal base of the modern liberal political system was completed with its principal laws of 1867-1868. The constitution of December 1867

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<sup>1</sup> Zdeněk R. Nešpor and others, *Náboženství v 19. století, Nej církevnější století nebo období zrodu českého ateismu?* [Religion in the 19th Century. The Most Religious Century or the Period of the Birth of Czech Atheism?] (Prague: Scriptorium, 2010), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Zdeněk R. Nešpor, *Náboženství „mírného pokroku v mezích zákona“* [Religion of the “Moderate Progress within the Confines of Law”], in *Variety české religiozity v „dlouhém“ 19. století* [Varieties of Czech Religiosity in the “Long” 19th Century] ed. by Zdeněk R. Nešpor and Kristina Kaiserová, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Nešpor and others, p. 284.

<sup>4</sup> Jana Macháčová and Jiří Matějček, *Nástin sociálního vývoje českých zemí 1781-1914* [The Outline of Social Development of Czech Countries 1781-1914] (Prague: Karolinum, 2010), p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> Jiří Rajmund Tretera, ‘Vztah státu a církve v českých zemích od 18. století do pádu monarchie’ [The Relation of State and Churches in Czech Countries from the 18th century to the Fall of the Monarchy], *Právněhistorické studie* 39, Prague 2007, p. 151.

consisted of five laws; especially important was the Act of Universal Rights of Citizens No. 142/1867, which confirmed full freedom of worship and separated state affairs from the private religious life of citizens.<sup>6</sup> Article 15 of the Act gave full rights and autonomy to recognised churches. The position of Baptists and other independent churches was solved by the following article, Article 16, which stated: 'Home church services of the followers of legally non-certified confessions are allowed, they are neither illegal nor disgraceful.' According to the Act No. 49/1868, which regulated relations between churches, members of these churches had the formal status of 'without religion'. Hostile attitudes of the liberal government towards the Catholic Church caused the cancellation of the Concordat in 1874. Then four laws were issued, which dealt with the autonomy of churches and monasteries. The Act No. 68/1874, which dealt with conditions for the acknowledgement of new churches by the state, was very liberal and crowned the development of religious legislation in the western part of the Habsburg monarchy towards a parity-coordinate system.<sup>7</sup> Baptists, however, were not interested in state acknowledgement, as they advocated strict separation of state and church.

## Help from the Evangelical Alliance

The legislative platform established by the monarchy brought full rights to all Christians. Oncken, coming to the capital, Vienna, depicted the religious situation of the 1870s in the Austrian empire in optimistic terms. He judged that the situation had radically improved since 1848 and that Baptists could now work better.<sup>8</sup> However, this legislative development collided with the rigidity of local authorities, supported by the hostility of the major churches, both Catholic and Protestant. Pastor Adlof of the Free Reformed Church wrote that, especially during the year 1878, there appeared tendencies towards restriction of the religious liberty of non-recognised churches. Therefore, missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and affiliated Czech Christians signed three petitions to the Evangelical Alliance.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Karel Malý and Florian Sívák, *Dějiny státu a práva v Československu* [The History of State and Law in Czechoslovakia], Vol. 1 (Prague: Panorama, 1988), pp. 431–432.

<sup>7</sup> Zábaj Horák and Jiří R. Tretera, *Konfesní právo – Tézé k přednáškám 2013/2014* [Confessional Law – Propositions to Lectures], p. 23 <<https://www.prf.cuni.cz/dokumenty-download/1404048807>> [accessed 17 March 2018]

<sup>8</sup> Rudolf Donat, *Wie das Werk begann* [How the Work began] (Kassel: J.G.Oncken Verlag 1958), pp. 432, 437.

<sup>9</sup> Alois Adlof, *Nástin dějin svobodných církví křesťanských, zvláště pak svobodné reformované církve české* [The Outline of the History of Free Christian Churches, especially the Czech Free Reformed Church] (Prague, 1905), pp. 36–37.

The Alliance sought legal advice and then a deputation was sent to Vienna. Two members of the deputation were received by the Minister of Public Instruction, Stremayer, who expressed regret about the over-eager actions of lower authorities. During a meeting with the Emperor, Franz Joseph II expressed the opinion that the oppression had its origins in the Protestant Church authorities rather than in the Catholic Church and promised help. These negotiations confirmed the opinion of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions regarding ‘...an ultramontane reaction, especially in the provincial governments of Austria’. The Report added: ‘This reaction seems not, however, to have reached the Central Government of Austria, which appears to be less affected by priestly influence...’<sup>10</sup>

The intervention of the Evangelical Alliance resulted in the Ministerial Ordinance of December 1879, which guaranteed freedom of religion of non-certified churches.<sup>11</sup> The ordinance stated that ‘the supporters of stately non-recognised confessions are not to be prevented from permitted conducting of in-house religion..., it is possible to enable public meetings as well.’<sup>12</sup> The Habsburg monarch Franz Joseph helped these Protestant citizens, who appreciated it. The pastor of the Free Reformed Church wrote that ‘...grateful prayers for the emperor, who did not allow the persecution of his believer subjects, rose up to heaven’.<sup>13</sup> This whole initiative shows the certain confidence of evangelical Protestants in Bohemia in the central Habsburg authorities, left out of their official historical narrative after 1918.

## The First Baptists in North-Eastern Bohemia

The first Baptist missionary activities in Bohemia emerged in the north-eastern part of country in the 1850s. As it was difficult to get Bibles at that time, a man went across the border to Prussian Silesia in order to buy one. He met Baptist Pastor Magnus Knappe, who then started to visit the region around the city of Broumov. His missionary activities resulted in the birth of the first (German speaking) Baptist fellowship in Bohemia. North-eastern Bohemia was a region with a strong Catholic influence and this environment

<sup>10</sup> *Sixty Fifth Annual Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Presented at the Meeting Held at Chicago, Illinois, October 5-8, 1875* (Boston: Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1875), p. 81.

<sup>11</sup> Miloslav Košťál, ‘Probuzení v druhé polovině 19. století a Svobodná církev reformovaná 1880-1919’ [The Awakening in the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Free Reformed Church], in: *Sto let ve službě evangelia 1880-1980. Jubilejní sborník Církve Bratrské* (Prague: Rada Církve Bratrské, 1981), p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Michaela Beňová, ‘Právní systém kongregačních církví a zřízení Církve bratrské’ [The Legal System of Congregational Churches and the System of the Church of Brethren], *Revue církevního práva*, No. 10, 1998, p. 96.

<sup>13</sup> Alois Adlof, *Nástin dějin svobodných církví křesťanských, zvláště pak svobodné reformované církve české* [The Outline of the History of Free Christian Churches, especially the Czech Free Reformed Church] (Prague, 1905), pp. 37-40.

had a negative effect on the life of the Baptist fellowship around Magnus Knappe. They experienced a lot of difficulties – they were dismissed from employment, their meetings were terminated, and their deceased were buried in the part of cemetery reserved for suicides.

A Kafkaesque incident occurred in March 1875. Pastor Knappe was arrested, due to illegal public services, and was brought to the local authorities. However, they were absent from the office. A policeman wanted to put him into the jail, but the jailer refused to arrest him and so a quarrel ensued. Finally, Pastor Knappe had to stay in the jail, though his treatment was not harsh. Knappe generally appreciated the forthcoming approach of the authorities; the whole case had been initiated by local Catholic clergy. Of significance is the comment of the regional law court executive, made on the basis of newspaper information: ‘It is remarkable. In Rome, Baptists build chapels with three hundred seats, and here in Austria, they are locked up.’<sup>14</sup>

Another problematic area was the upbringing of children. In September 1880, one married couple left the Catholic Church and joined the Baptists. On 11 October 1880, a daughter was born into their family. On 14 October they received an instruction from the district government to let their daughter be christened and to announce in which church they planned to do it. The husband formally opposed this, stating that, according to the law, they were not obliged to do it. The authority of the bishop of Hradec Králové interfered in the case and the Viennese ministry of religion ordered the married couple to christen their daughter, or they would be forced to christen her.<sup>15</sup> After two years of judicial proceedings, in which the Baptists were defended by the famous Viennese barrister and politician Joseph Kopp, the administrative court decided that the decision of the Ministry of Religion was unlawful.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, in 1900, one member of the Broumov church was fined, because he did not force his eleven-year-old Catholic daughter to go to confession. Again, he was defended in court in Vienna by Josef Kopp, who accepted no payment. The case was widely covered by the press.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Knappe, *Magnus Knappe, ein von Gott zubereitetes Werkzeug zur Verbreitung evangelischer Wahrheit im Schlessierlande* [Magnus Knappe, A Tool Prepared by God for the Spreading of the True Gospel in Silesia] (Hannover, 1919), pp. 36-39.

<sup>15</sup> Prague Vinohrady Baptist Church Archive, File Broumov, typewritten extract from *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt*, April 22, 1882.

<sup>16</sup> Prague Vinohrady Baptist Church Archive, File Broumov, typewritten extract from *Prager Tagblatt*, April 24, 1882.

<sup>17</sup> *Posel Pokoje*, No. 6, Vol. VIII, June 1900, pp. 47-48.

## The First Baptist Pastor and Church

North-Eastern Bohemia was also the birthplace of Jindřich Novotný, the first pastor of the first Czech Baptist church. Novotný originally cooperated with missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM). According to the Annual Report of the American Board, their position in Prague was difficult:

Our men must work side by side with existing Protestant churches, orthodox in doctrine, it may be, but generally destitute of religious life. They cannot ally themselves with these dead churches, but they can cooperate with the living members of them.<sup>18</sup>

The missionaries experienced aversion not only from Catholic clergy, but also from Protestant pastors.<sup>19</sup> Although there appeared some renewal tendencies in the Reformed church at that time, which sought more vivid faith and contributed to the deepening of spiritual life, they represented only minority tendencies. In Prague, the missionary activities were ardently opposed from rationalist positions by Reformed pastor Benjamin Košut. Largely due to this opposition, the activities of the American Board resulted in the birth of the new Free Reformed Church, although it had not been the initial aim.<sup>20</sup> Henry Novotný became its pastor.

However, soon after, Novotný became acquainted with Baptist principles in Scotland and joined the Baptists. With his contribution, the first Baptist church in Bohemia was established in the area of Prague in 1885. This small independent church and its pastor experienced problems similar to other non-legalised churches. A somewhat hagiographic account of Henry Novotný's life stated: 'A sad triumvirate of enemies tried to stop him: the authorities, the Roman Catholic Church and the people he had left.... former friends...' <sup>21</sup> The son of Henry Novotný remembered how his father had regularly visited the authorities, how he was required to report his activities, and how he stood trial several times.<sup>22</sup> Police controlled the Baptist gatherings, which were often cancelled and members were fined.<sup>23</sup> Novotný

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<sup>18</sup> *Sixty Third Annual Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Presented at the Meeting Held at Minneapolis, Minnesota, September 23-26, 1873* (Boston: Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1873), p. XXIX.

<sup>19</sup> *Sixty Sixth Annual Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Presented at the Meeting Held at Hartford, Connecticut, October 3-6, 1876* (Boston: Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1876), p. 102.

<sup>20</sup> Adlof, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Novotný, *Baptist Romance in the Heart of Europe (Czechoslovakia). The Life and Times of Henry Novotny* (Czechoslovak Baptist Convention in America and Canada, 1939), p. 77.

<sup>22</sup> Józsa Novotný, *Pilný život. Ze života Jindřicha Novotného st.* [Diligent Life. From the Life of Henry Novotný] (Prague: Sunday School), p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Jan Bistranin, *Svobodná církev ve svobodném státě - Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk a čeští baptisté* [A Free Church in a Free State – Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Czech Baptists] on-line: <<https://www.bjb.cz/clanky/historie/624-svobodna-cirkev-ve-svobodnem-state-tomas-garrigue-masaryk-a-cesti-baptiste-j-bistranin>> [accessed 17 March 2018]



even stood trial for ‘spreading or establishing a new religion, which contradicts law’.<sup>24</sup> Relations with the major Protestant churches were generally tense as well. One of the first Czech Baptists described a case, when a local Protestant pastor and mayor accused Baptists of enticing people into their church; however, the district law court acquitted them.<sup>25</sup>

Free churches, including Baptists, emerged as an opposition to the churches under state control in the Habsburg monarchy.<sup>26</sup> They did not want to be controlled by any law, which, on the other hand, complicated the situation. For example, the questions around the ownership of prayer halls emerged, as aptly described by Jan Bistranin:

Baptists created loose associations, but in the moment, when they acquired their own prayer hall, there a problem with its ownership was arisen. To avoid connection with the state and to legally secure congregational property, they solved the issue in their congregations by founding of associations according to corporation law No. 134 from 1867. It was problematic, the law itself stated it does not apply to religious communities, and associations were subordinate to supervision of authorities.<sup>27</sup>

These efforts were, according to Nešpor, ‘on the edge of law’ and ‘the birth of Free churches was in fact always illegal’.<sup>28</sup> In 1906, pastors of Baptist churches in Austria submitted an application to the ministry, where they demanded the extension of corporation law to include Baptists.<sup>29</sup> Even the MP and future first president of the Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, unsuccessfully tried to support this effort.<sup>30</sup>

However, the law system of the Habsburg monarchy was inconsistent, and the application of the assembly law presents a good example of this inconsistency. At the second congress of the Baptist World Alliance, the Baptist Pastor of Brno, Norbert Čapek, quoted the words of one governmental official: ‘Every Austrian law has a hole in it and if you like, you can go through.’ In his own words, those holes are ‘so wide that our whole nation could be converted and become a Baptist nation and go with flying flags through these wide gates and the Austrian Government would

<sup>24</sup> Prague-Vinohrady Baptist Church Archive, Diary of Henry Novotny, The accounts from February 21 and 26, 1887.

<sup>25</sup> Václav Hendrich, *Počátek historie baptistů, čili u víře pokřtěných křesťanů v Čechách* [The Origin of History of Baptists, or Believers Baptised Christians] (Brno, 1929), p. 112.

<sup>26</sup> Zdeněk R. Nešpor, *Modernizace českého evangelického prostředí: případ svobodných církví* [The Modernization of Czech Protestant Environment: The case of Free churches] in: *Český časopis historický*, 1/2012, p. 25.

<sup>27</sup> Jan Bistranin, *Vztah českých baptistů a státu* [The Relation of Czech Baptists and State] on-line: <<https://www.bjb.cz/clanky/historie/629-vztah-ceskych-baptistu-a-statu-j-bistranin>> [accessed 17 March 2018]

<sup>28</sup> Nešpor, *Modernizace českého evangelického prostředí*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>29</sup> Prague-Vinohrady Baptist Church Archive, The Book of Records of the Congregation No. 2, The Record from July 8, 1906.

<sup>30</sup> Prague-Vinohrady Baptist Church Archive, handwritten Requisite for the History of Baptists in Bohemia.

be obliged to say: “Amen!””<sup>31</sup> However, more often these ‘holes’ served restrictive rather than liberating; depending on their interpretation by local officials, Baptist activities could be limited or hindered. Baptists often responded with their own interpretation. Formal ownership of the Baptist prayer hall in Prague provides a further example of this inconsistency. The first meetings of the young church took place in the pastor’s house. When it was too tight there, Henry Novotný built the first prayer house in the garden of his house in 1886.<sup>32</sup> However, the authorities closed it in January 1887 and Novotný was fined.<sup>33</sup> Police forbade further meetings there, because the worship was not an in-house private service in a strict sense; it took place in the garden building.<sup>34</sup> The congregation had to return to Novotný’s house. However, he soon rented a room for the church, in a house where his co-worker Václav Králíček lived. ‘In this way the...services were really ‘home’, in a private apartment, and thus all accusations were of no effect’,<sup>35</sup> records the history of the church.

The legal route to ownership had to be found. The church felt an urgent need for their own prayer hall at the beginning of the twentieth century. Unwittingly, younger members of the church helped with the solution. In August 1908, they established an abstinence society and, in February 1912, the first proposals appeared to transfer the church property to it.<sup>36</sup> In the spring of 1913, Dr Gill from the Baptist Missionary Society came to review the situation of the congregation, especially concerning property, in connection with obtaining financial support from abroad for the building of the prayer hall. In June 1913, it was approved to change the status of the church to one of a society.<sup>37</sup> The newly formed *Chelčický society* (named after an independent medieval theologian of the Hussite era) formally received the church property.<sup>38</sup> Baptists bought a new house in Prague-Vinohrady and, in 1914, the headstone of the new prayer hall was laid in its backyard. The congregation has remained at this location until today.

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<sup>31</sup> *The Baptist World Congress. London, July 11-19, 1905. Authorised Record of Proceedings* (London: Baptist Union Publication Department, 1905), pp. 227-228.

<sup>32</sup> Prague-Vinohrady Baptist Church Archive, handwritten Requisite for the History of Baptists in Bohemia.

<sup>33</sup> *Historie sborů BJB v ČR* [The History of Congregations of Brotherly Union of Baptists in Czech Republic] (Prague, 1994), p. 65.

<sup>34</sup> Prague-Vinohrady Baptist Church Archive, The File of Henry Novotný, Police Proceeding from January 7, 1887.

<sup>35</sup> Prague-Vinohrady Baptist Church Archive, handwritten Requisite for the History of Baptists in Bohemia.

<sup>36</sup> Prague-Vinohrady Baptist Church Archive, The Book of Records of the Congregation No. 3, Record from February 11, 1912.

<sup>37</sup> Prague-Vinohrady Baptist Church Archive, The Book of Records of the Congregation No. 3, Record from June 1, 1913.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Novotný, *Baptist Romance in the Heart of Europe (Czechoslovakia). The Life and Times of Henry Novotný* (Czechoslovak Baptist Convention in America and Canada, 1939), p. 98.

## Conclusion

The early history of Baptists in Bohemia offers a good view of a society in which a contemporary concept of religion emerges. The Austro-Hungarian empire secured religious freedom for all religious bodies, including Baptists. This was secularisation from above; changes in people's mentality came more slowly. Ideals stated in laws and everyday reality were often far removed from each other. This article demonstrates that lower-level authorities caused major obstacles to Baptists and other small churches. This was accompanied by misunderstandings and sometimes hostility from people who perceived Baptists as a strange movement. One specific area of difficulty was the ownership of church property. The worship services for minority churches, such as Baptists, were allowed in private houses or apartments, but – in the strict sense of the law – there was no space for Baptist-owned church buildings. The situation was resolved only in 1913 when the *Chelčický society* was established. The congregation was formally turned into a society and could become the owner of the property. This is one example of Czech Baptists, in their early years, finding their way through the labyrinth of laws and interpretations which could secure the life and development of the Baptist movement.

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## **‘Fresh Black Bread’: The Practice of Religious Freedom Among Evangelicals in the Russian Empire, 1905-1914**

Mary Raber

### **Introduction**

In 1911, somewhere in the Caucasus, an agitated crowd of villagers armed themselves with sticks and gathered on the road to put a stop to the travels of a Baptist preacher who was holding meetings in the area. As a wagon came into view, the restless mob prepared to jam the wheels and end the preacher’s journey once and for all. But they froze in confusion and let the vehicle go by unhindered when the passenger greeted them pleasantly.

What stopped them? Was it her friendly greeting, or had they not realised that the fearsome preacher was a woman – Agaf’ia Ivanovna Kapranova? When the crowd assailed her, she was on an evangelistic journey through the region, probably sponsored at least in part by her home congregation in Tiflis (Tbilisi). The trip was the latest step in a public ministry career that began in 1906 as an effective personal evangelist, distributor and translator of literature, and Sunday school teacher. One of her last stops on the 1911 preaching tour had been in Prokhladnyi where the local prayer house, which seated 400, was packed for days with people praying and repenting. An eyewitness reported, ‘... in the 18 years we have been here, we have never seen such a revival’.<sup>1</sup>

A few months before Kapranova’s trip, at the 1911 congress of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Pastor William A. Fetler (1883-1957) from St. Petersburg reflected on the current situation of Russian evangelicals by comparing dry crusts and fresh black bread. He was referring to the changes that had come about six years before, on 17 April 1905, when the imperial edict, ‘On the strengthening of the beginnings of religious toleration’, legalised evangelicalism<sup>2</sup>, especially the movement of people from the Russian Orthodox Church to other groups. The following year, on 17 October 1906, another edict laid the groundwork for officially registering non-Orthodox congregations. Because of this legislation, Russian evangelicals, according to Fetler, were gratefully

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<sup>1</sup> N., “Izvestiia s nashego polia” [News from our field], *Baptist*, No. 43 (19 October 1911), p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘evangelical’ will be used in this article in its broadest sense, including Baptists, Evangelical Christians, Molokans, Mennonites, and other ‘sectarians’ of the Russian Empire.

enjoying the 'whole fresh baked black bread' of freedom and legality that was now available to them, so different from the 'dry crusts' they used to eat, meaning their previous oppressed and restricted status.<sup>3</sup>

## Religious Freedom in Russia After 1905

What were some of the ingredients in the bread the evangelicals had been eating since 1905, or, in other words, what were some of the things that had changed since then? Kapranova's tour reveals a few details.

Note that Kapranova sometimes addressed sizeable crowds gathered in large buildings. The new circumstances permitted evangelicals to hold meetings and to build. The 400-seat prayer house in Prokhladnyĭ was actually rather modest compared to some others constructed during the same era: a village church in Tambov guberniia was built to seat 800<sup>4</sup>; the Balashov (Saratov guberniia) prayer house could accommodate 900<sup>5</sup>; and the Baptist flagship church, Dom Evangeliiia [House of the Gospel] in St. Petersburg, could hold at least 2,000.<sup>6</sup>

Besides this, we know about Kapranova's journey through a report in a church-based journal, *Baptist* [The Baptist], which in 1911 was still quite a new publication, having first appeared in 1907. It was preceded by *Khristianin* [The Christian], which began publication in 1906, and was followed by *Gost'* [The Visitor] in 1910. In addition, there were a number of other evangelical publications and supplementary leaflets printed during this era, skilfully used to distribute sermons, poems, missionary reports, articles on important social issues, hymns, and local and international news. The availability of such journals represents another major change after 1905. Prior to that, since 1885, the only evangelical publication in Russian had been printed on a homemade hectograph and distributed illegally.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, it is, of course, significant that the evangelist was a woman. Kapranova's case is apparently unique and worth further study,<sup>8</sup> but the acceptance of her wide-ranging preaching ministry suggests that during the

<sup>3</sup> *The Baptist World Alliance Second Congress. Philadelphia, June 19-25, 1911, Record of Proceedings Published under the Auspices of the Philadelphia Committee* (Philadelphia: Harper & Brother Company, 1911), p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Bratskii listok*, No. 4 (1907), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> V. G. Pavlov, "Pis'mo s puti" [A letter from the journey], *Baptist* No. 2 (8 January 1910), p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Dr A. McCaig, *Wonders of Grace in Russia* (Riga: Revival, 1926), pp. 124-25.

<sup>7</sup> Ivan Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia, 1869-1933* (New York: All-Russian Evangelical Christian Union, 1933), pp. 67-69. A journal in Estonian, entitled *Teekäija* [The Pilgrim] was published beginning in 1904 by a Baptist preacher, Andres Tetermann. Üllas Linder and Toivo Pilli, eds., *Osaduses kasvanud* [Grown in Fellowship] (Tallinn: Eesti EKB Koguduste Liit, 2009), p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> See Mary Raber, "Blagovestnitsa Agaf'ia Ivanovna Kapranova" [Evangelist Agar'ia Ivanovna Kapranova], *Bogomyslie* No. 18 (2016), 104-111.

1910s evangelicals in Russia were interested above all in spreading the gospel.

This is the era that the Baku preacher and journalist V. V. Ivanov (1848-1919) called ‘the epoch of the open storm’ in the military sense of storming or assault.<sup>9</sup> He was referring to the evangelicals’ all-out approach to sharing the gospel, and, indeed, since the start of the official policy of religious toleration in 1905 the movement had experienced a significant growth spurt. A government survey on sectarianism published in 1912 established that between April 1905 and January 1912, both the Russian Baptist Union and the Evangelical Christian Union had each increased their membership by about one-third, to a total of nearly 100,000 members in the two unions taken together.<sup>10</sup> The overall number is not very large, but it represents a sharp increase in a relatively short period. With regard to Kapranova, the statistic suggests that at that time evangelism – even when done by a woman preacher addressing public meetings – took precedence over defining appropriate men’s and women’s roles in the church.

Thus, using Kapranova’s case to illustrate, Fetler’s ‘fresh black bread’ analogy signifies a deep commitment to active evangelism, sizeable worship gatherings, building projects, and freedom to publish. To this list should be added the return of preachers and other prisoners of conscience from exile,<sup>11</sup> the organisation of theological study courses,<sup>12</sup> the start-up of specifically evangelical charitable institutions,<sup>13</sup> and the sending of numerous evangelists.<sup>14</sup>

How, then, are we to interpret the crowd armed with sticks that hindered Kapranova on her 1911 tour? Fetler explained it in this way: ‘fresh black bread’ may be good, but it is still not the fresh white bread with butter and cheese that the Russian evangelicals actually preferred.<sup>15</sup> That is, ‘fresh black bread’ signified a complex and contradictory situation – better than dry crusts, but not as good as the cheese sandwiches of total freedom! In other words, even after 1905 complete religious freedom still evaded the evangelicals.

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<sup>9</sup> V. V. Ivanov, “Polozhenie baptistov” [The situation of Baptists], *Baptist*, No. 9 (23 February 1911), p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> Cited by Heather J. Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Prokhanoff, *In the Cauldron of Russia*, pp. 136-37.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Raber, *Ministries of Compassion among Russian Evangelicals, 1905-1929* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2016), pp. 84-112.

<sup>14</sup> V. G. Pavlov, ‘Nashi sobraniia i torzhestva’ [Our meetings and celebrations], *Baptist*, No. 2 (August 1907), p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> *The Baptist World Alliance Second Congress*, p. 21.

Thus, the implementation of religious freedom in Russia was uneven between 1905, the year of official toleration, and 1914, the year that patriotic fervour associated with World War I all but completely shut down the evangelicals. What are some of the strategies that they employed to counteract intermittent oppression during this period and what do these strategies suggest about the character of the movement? This paper will briefly describe and analyse several kinds of interaction between evangelicals, government officials, and Orthodox clergy that took place between 1905 and 1914. This treatment is not exhaustive. Rather it is intended to illustrate some of the complexities and variety of Russian evangelical life during this period.

## Intermittent Oppression

Instances of unfair treatment or even violence on the part of Orthodox clergy or local ruffians were routinely reported by means of letters sent from various places throughout Russia to the evangelical journals. For example, during the 1910s nearly every issue of *Bratskii listok* [Fraternal messenger], the supplement to the journal *Khristianin*, reported at least one case of mistreatment. A few examples from 1906 and 1907 will illustrate. In Tsaritsyn evangelicals were beaten.<sup>16</sup> A crowd of some 300 people broke up a prayer meeting in a private house in a village in Zvenigorod uезд (Kyiv guberniia), smashed the windows, and beat up the participants.<sup>17</sup> Also in Kyiv guberniia, two funerals were disrupted and evangelicals were refused a place to bury their dead.<sup>18</sup>

Instances of pressure continued throughout the years. To return to the 1911 story of Agaf'ia Kapranova in the Caucasus, in Staro-Pavlovskaiia, shortly after her encounter with the stick-wielding villagers, her meeting was broken up by the ataman (chieftain) with a group of armed Cossacks. Later that same night, Kapranova herself was seized, her hands were bound, and she was taken to the town administrative office. She was separated from her friends who then watched the proceedings through the windows. Kapranova was locked in a room with the ataman who shook her by the shoulder and threatened her. The Orthodox priest then joined them and continued the taunts.<sup>19</sup> As the frustrated witness of a thwarted evangelical funeral fumed, 'I ask you, where is the freedom of faith that was given by the edict of 17 April 1905?'<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> 'Iz Tsaritsyna br. S. P. pishet' [From Tsaritsyn, brother S. P. writes], *Bratskii listok*, No. 1 (1906), p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> 'Br. I. P. K. pishet iz Kieva' [Brother I.P.K. writes from Kyiv], *Bratskii listok*, No. 4 (1906), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Bratskii listok*, No. 4 (1907), pp. 8, 10.

<sup>19</sup> N., 'Izvestiia s nashego polia' [News from our field], *Baptist*, No. 43 (19 October 1911), p. 341.

<sup>20</sup> *Bratskii listok*, No. 4 (1907), p. 10.

The difficulty was that, although the new laws permitted freedom of conscience and the legal status of evangelical congregations, they conflicted with Article 90 of the criminal code of 1903, which forbade public activity that drew people away from the Orthodox Church and into other groups. Thus, it was legal to leave Orthodoxy and join another church, but it was punishable to be the cause of that transfer.<sup>21</sup> This was the source of Kapranova's trouble.

## The Legal Response

The evangelicals, however, were far from helpless in the face of abuses. They understood very well their standing before the law and among the leadership were people who were willing and able to launch a serious and systematic campaign to defend evangelical citizens' freedom of conscience. Both W. A. Fetler of the Baptists and I. S. Prokhanov (1869-1935), the leader of the Evangelical Christians, produced guidebooks on the law and freedom of conscience.<sup>22</sup>

In addition, the routine reporting of injustice in their press formed an important part of the response, creating what might be called a 'community of concern', but evangelicals also interacted formally with the government and the courts. The active participation of believers in discussions on clarifying and refining the law was urged in the evangelical press.<sup>23</sup>

In January 1905 evangelical leaders from St. Petersburg, Kharkiv, and Kyiv addressed a 'Short memorandum' [*Kratkaia zapiska*] to the Ministry of the Interior pointing out instances of repression against evangelicals, which indicates that they had already been studying the situation and gathering information for some time. One of the signatories of the memorandum was Ivan Petrovich Kushnerov, the son of an Orthodox priest who had become a Baptist in Kyiv in 1893. He earned his livelihood from a variety of jobs, but also apparently had some kind of legal training. As early as 1894 he had worked to defend believers on trial, with his travel expenses covered by the Russian Baptist Union. During the 1910s he regularly reported on the situation of evangelicals throughout Russia, wrote explanatory articles on the law and citizens' rights, and prepared legal

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<sup>21</sup> Tatiana Nikol'skaia, *Russkii protestantizm i gosudarstvennaia vlast' v 1905-1991 godakh* [Russian Protestantism and state power, 1905-1991], (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt-Peterburge, 2009), p. 28; Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, p. 32.

<sup>22</sup> Albert W. Wardin, Jr., *On the Edge: Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855-1917* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2013), p. 341.

<sup>23</sup> 'Vysochaishii ukaz 17-ogo oktiabra 1906 g.' [The imperial edict of 17 October 1906], *Bratskii listok*, No. 12 (1906), p. 22.



cases.<sup>24</sup> The January 1905 document was included in the materials gathered by the Ministry of the Interior concerning religious toleration.<sup>25</sup>

Other petitions, such as one dated 21 May 1906 from the St. Petersburg Evangelical Christian congregation to the president of the Council of Ministers, Sergei Witte (1849-1915), further contributed to the discussions around the 17 October 1906 edict on the status of sectarian congregations.<sup>26</sup> A general meeting of Evangelical Christians and Baptists came together in St. Petersburg in January 1907 specifically to discuss the existing laws and propose changes to the government.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, although life was still often difficult for evangelicals during the 1905-1914 era of 'fresh black bread', they nevertheless resorted to legal processes and advocacy to defend their rights and worked within the system to improve their situation. Ultimately, however, no legal framework was ever enacted by the government that would support the imperial edicts of 1905 and 1906. Moreover, beginning in about 1909 new restrictions steadily appeared, requiring permission to perform open air baptisms, limiting the number and kind of congresses that sectarian groups could hold each year, regulating outdoor meetings, and forbidding public criticism of the Orthodox Church.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, the evangelicals continued to gather and preach, often asserting their legal right to do so. In fact, much depended on the way laws were interpreted locally. Indeed, cases were sometimes decided in their favour. In 1908 the Ministry of the Interior supported the Baptists when they protested against the closure of prayer houses in St. Petersburg by the Most Holy Synod.<sup>29</sup> Charges made against Agaf'ia Ivanovna Kapranova in 1911 were dropped.<sup>30</sup>

## Seeking Influence Through Connections

In defending their religious rights, Russian evangelicals not only resorted to the legal system, but also made use of whatever influence was available to them. On many occasions, especially before 1905, upper-class evangelicals intervened with the authorities on behalf of their humbler brothers and

<sup>24</sup> Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution*, p. 32, n. 20; p. 234; Wardin, *On the Edge*, pp. 276-277.

<sup>25</sup> Nikol'skaia, *Russkii protestantizm i gosudarstvennaia vlast'*, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> 'Vysochaishii ukaz 17-ogo oktiabra 1906 g.' [The imperial edict of 17 October 1906], *Bratskii listok*, No. 12 (1906): 16-21.

<sup>27</sup> G. I. Mazaev, *Vospominaniia* [Recollections], (typewritten mss., n.d.), p. 61; Wardin, *On the Edge*, p. 329.

<sup>28</sup> Wardin, *On the Edge*, pp. 334-342.

<sup>29</sup> *Baptist*, No. 11 (1908): 39, cited by Wardin, *On the Edge*, p. 330.

<sup>30</sup> N., 'Izvestiia s nashego polia', p. 341.

sisters.<sup>31</sup> After 1909, as restrictions against sectarians increased, influential connections grew in importance, although the results of using them were sometimes ambiguous.

On one occasion, W. A. Fetler involved Maria Petrovna Miasoedova (1872-1961) in getting permission from the governor-general of Riga to hold a sizeable Baptist meeting at the city's Baptist mega-church – House of Golgotha. Miasoedova was a Russian aristocrat who had joined the Salvation Army in France in 1894. In about 1913 she returned to Russia, at least partly at Fetler's urging.<sup>32</sup> He now prevailed upon her to approach the governor, who was a friend of one of her relations. Miasoedova did so. The governor complained about Fetler and about the vulgar name of his church. He wondered aloud how Miasoedova let herself get mixed up with his erroneous teaching. Nevertheless, he finally gave his permission for the meeting, provided that it was conducted as quickly and quietly as possible. As a final condition, he asked that the gaudy electrical sign on the church roof proclaiming 'God is love', be switched off. The meeting took place without incident, but after it was over, Fetler again turned on the 'God is love' sign. When Miasoedova pointed out to him that, since the governor had kept his part of the agreement by allowing the meeting, the least Fetler could do was to comply with his conditions, Fetler retorted, 'I listen to God and not the governor'.

About a year later, in November 1914, Fetler was exiled abroad. During World War I, many other evangelical leaders would be suppressed and prayer houses closed. However, when Miasoedova described this incident in a letter to friends in 1953, she mildly suggested that Fetler's arrogance may have contributed to his exile as much as anything else: 'He never submitted, even when they allowed him to do what he wanted.'<sup>33</sup> Incidentally, Fetler's original sentence was exile to Siberia; however, the intervention of powerful friends and an outpouring of support from the USA, Europe, and Australia, led to his sentence being commuted to exile abroad, with ten days to prepare – an unusually generous concession. He conducted an evangelistic meeting every evening until his departure.<sup>34</sup>

Besides personal connections, the Russian Baptists relied on their ties to a large international community, represented especially by the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). In 1911, the second congress of the BWA in

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<sup>31</sup> S. P. Liven, *Dukhovnoe probuzhdenie v Rossii* [Spiritual awakening in Russia], 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Korntal: Svet na vostoce, 1990), pp. 59-60.

<sup>32</sup> S. V. Sevastianov, comp. and ed., 'Miasoedova Mariia Petrovna: K stoletiiu so dnia rozhdeniia' [Miasoedova Mariia Petrovna: On the one-hundredth anniversary of (her) birth], (typewritten mss. n. d.), p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>34</sup> John Fetler, *Bozhii glashatai, Uil'iam Fetler* [God's herald, William Fetler], trans. by Andrei Radchenko (Asheville, N.C.: Russian Bible Society & Revival Literature), pp. 84-90.

Philadelphia hosted at least thirty Russian delegates. Some of them experienced considerable difficulty in leaving the country in order to attend. To assist them, the BWA sent Rev. C. T. Byford to Russia with money for documents and travel expenses. The BWA also advanced more than US\$2000 to W. A. Fetler to be used for bail against a charge for illegal preaching so that he could travel abroad. Several delegates, including Fetler, were under threat of imprisonment upon their return to Russia.<sup>35</sup>

The Russians were met in Philadelphia with great enthusiasm, and more attention was given to them than to other international visitors. Each was introduced individually, along with a glowing description of his or her heroic exploits for the faith. Indeed, all of them had made immense sacrifices for their convictions, but the fanfare and excitement did not allow for a nuanced reading of their current situation, in spite of the 'fresh black bread' analogy in one of Fetler's speeches. It is clear that evangelicals in Russia continued to endure many serious injustices. However, the experiences some Russian delegates, such as Vasiliĭ Gur'evich Pavlov (1854-1924), described of prison and lengthy periods of exile that had taken place in the 1890s, were carelessly conflated with the present in their American listeners' minds.<sup>36</sup> Several years later in St. Petersburg, Fetler told James H. Franklin, secretary for the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, that it had been a mistake to tell stories of oppression prior to 1905 without clarifying that in 1911 conditions, although difficult, had changed.<sup>37</sup>

Events in Philadelphia did not go unnoticed at home. One response was a furious rebuttal in a booklet that reproduced the translated text of a series of newspaper articles that had appeared during the congress in *The Philadelphia Press*. The compiler of the booklet was Archpriest I. I. Vostorgov (1864-1918), who was appointed by the Most Holy Synod in 1906 as a preacher and missionary with a special focus on sectarians.<sup>38</sup> For his Russian readers, Vostorgov interspersed the text of the American newspaper articles with his own acid commentary: 'What self-promotion!', 'What lies!', 'So many lies and fabrications!', 'Go ahead, Americans, open up your pockets!'.

Some of Vostorgov's rhetoric reveals his ignorance or bias, for example when he objected, 'No one in Russia has ever heard anything about

<sup>35</sup> Wardin, *On the Edge*, pp. 348-49.

<sup>36</sup> Archpriest I. I. Vostorgov, *Kak lgali russkie baptisty, vo glave s Fetlerom, v Amerike na Tserkov' Pravoslavnuu i na russkoe pravitel'stvo* [How did the Russian Baptists, led by Fetler, lie about the Orthodox Church and the Russian government?], n.d., pp. 13-14.

<sup>37</sup> Wardin, *On the Edge*, p. 352.

<sup>38</sup> Priest Afanasii Gumerov, 'Zhitie protoiereia Ioanna Ioannovich Vostorgova (1864-1918)' [Life of Archpriest Ioann Ioannovich Vostorgov (1864-1918)], 5 March 2002, <[www.pravoslavie.ru/1450.html](http://www.pravoslavie.ru/1450.html)> [accessed 30 July 2018] It is worth noting that Vostorgov was shot by the Cheka in 1918 and is now venerated as a martyr by the Russian Orthodox Church.

chains or prison for Baptists!’<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, reading the newspaper’s gushing account one senses the eagerness of the congress for drama, and the temptation of the Russian brethren to ‘play to the crowd’ perhaps a bit more than was strictly necessary. At one point, in describing the need of the Russian Baptist churches for material support, V. G. Pavlov stretched out his arms in a wide embrace and implored, ‘Come everyone and help us!’ Immediately, his listeners responded, ‘We will help!’<sup>40</sup> In answer to several emotional appeals that were made during the congress, the BWA swiftly gathered an offering and subscriptions in the amount of US\$100,000 for the founding of a Baptist seminary in Russia.<sup>41</sup>

In the end, the BWA connection turned out to be ‘...both a strength and a stumbling block’.<sup>42</sup> The Russian Baptists’ disloyalty in criticising their country in a foreign setting was duly noted by the authorities, and the Baptist World Alliance was regarded with disfavour for providing the forum for doing so. Attempts to open a theological seminary foundered for myriad reasons, including the authorities’ suspicion of a non-conformist group with substantial foreign funding, confusion among competing visions for theological training, and personality conflicts. World War I and subsequent events swallowed up all such efforts. The fund collected in 1911, however, was eventually contributed toward the establishment of Moscow Baptist Theological Seminary during the 1990s.<sup>43</sup>

Influential connections were thus called upon during this time to affect decisions and provide support for evangelical believers. However, the outcome of the strategy was mixed, largely because of the perception of evangelicals as brash and duplicitous.

## Debates

Formal disputes or ‘conversations’ (*besedy*) with Orthodox clergy were another strategy used by evangelicals to express their freedom by presenting their convictions to the public. Disputes were theological in content and had the effect of familiarising audiences with evangelical teaching, inviting listeners to think and compare, and also eliciting sympathy.

Such conversations were not uncommon even before 1905. In the lengthy memoirs of Gavriil Ivanovich Mazaev (1858-1937), president of the Siberian Baptist Union and the younger brother of longtime Russian Baptist Union president Deï Ivanovich Mazaev (1855-1922), he described several

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<sup>39</sup> Vostorgov, *Kak Igali...*, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>41</sup> Wardin, *On the Edge*, pp. 350-351; Vostorgov, *Kak Igali...*, pp. 12-14, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Wardin, *On the Edge*, p. 334.

<sup>43</sup> Wardin, *On the Edge*, pp. 397-403.

more or less public disputes that took place during the 1890s, sometimes in a schoolhouse or other venue and sometimes in Mazaev's own home. It was a risky business. Presumably, the meetings were intended to be informative and were fairly friendly, but an Orthodox missionary could also take steps to have a sectarian opponent jailed.<sup>44</sup>

On one occasion when Mazaev faced off against the diocesan missionary for the Don region, Nikolai Petrovich Kutepov (1852-1915), the latter spent the night at Mazaev's house. Before going to bed, Kutepov expressed surprise that Baptists seemed so fearful of debating with him. Mazaev retorted that, on the contrary, the Baptists were not at all afraid to prove their views and actions on the basis of the Bible, but they hesitated to debate because they regarded the priests as merely a different kind of police officer: 'The police wear one kind of cockade, and you wear another'. Mazaev continued: 'Who has conversed with you and avoided exile?... Tell me, who?', and went on to name several Baptist leaders who had been punished:

Pavlov conversed with you; where is he? Voronin conversed with you, and where is he? Bogdanov, Levashev—where are they? Who disputed with you and remained at home? Maybe it's my turn now... We're not afraid of debates, but of the results of debates.

Mazaev concluded, 'I was really glad that the Lord gave me the opportunity to tell him the truth to his face'. Before he left the house, a rather chastened Kutepov assured Mazaev that he would do nothing to harm him.<sup>45</sup>

In the post-1905 era, the consequences of public disputes were less severe. Indeed, the evangelicals sometimes treated them rather smugly, as a good opportunity to show up their Orthodox opponents. V. G. Pavlov, a Baptist leader from the Caucasus, who several years later would tell the BWA gathering in Philadelphia about his years of exile, was invited to debate with an Orthodox cleric named Sokolov as part of the festivities surrounding the dedication of the new prayer house in Balashov in 1909. Pavlov wrote, 'The dedication of the prayer house forced the Orthodox clergy to take measures to wall off their flock.'<sup>46</sup> In other words, the Baptist prayer house attracted so much positive attention that the Orthodox were obliged to call a debate to make themselves heard. It is likely that Sokolov initiated the dispute because of a resolution made at the Fourth All-Russian Missionary Congress in Kyiv in July 1908 to engage in more public conversations with sectarians. Their goal – as it was for the evangelicals – was to inform and persuade the public.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Mazaev, *Vospominaniia*, p. 82.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>46</sup> V. G. Pavlov, 'Pis'mo s puti' [A letter from the journey], *Baptist*, No. 3 (13 January 1910), p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> Wardin, *On the Edge*, p. 336.

The debate took place in a local hall and drew approximately 1500 spectators. Sokolov debated with Pavlov from noon until 5:00 p.m. with a half-hour tea break in the middle. The first part was devoted to the issue of infant baptism and the second to the significance of the Lord's Supper. Pavlov's account sounds as though Sokolov's arguments were not well thought through, but the event was apparently conducted in an orderly way and everyone departed peacefully.<sup>48</sup>

## Informal Encounters

Of course, most interaction between Orthodox clergy and evangelicals was part of the give-and-take of everyday life. Letters to the evangelical press often described conversations that took place on trains or on the street. Spontaneous as they were, the conversations, like the formal disputes, sound stereotypical and rigid to twenty-first century ears – at least as they are described in the journals. Both the Orthodox and the evangelicals come across as tone-deaf, one simply confronting the other with an opposing set of propositions.

Most reported encounters depicted Orthodox clergy in an unfavourable light: boorish, evasive, and ignorant. Some probably were. At the same time, the purpose – even the delight – of their evangelical interlocutors was apparently to silence them rather than to persuade. In his report of a 1907 train journey, Gavriil Mazaev emphasised the bad manners of several priests on board. Their opinion of evangelicals was equally low. One of the priests boasted about the unbroken succession of the Russian priesthood from the apostle Andrew. 'And what do the sectarians have?' he concluded, 'They are lost people, darkened, perishing.'<sup>49</sup>

Articles in the Orthodox press of this period are openly hostile to the evangelicals, complaining that their goal was to subvert church teaching,<sup>50</sup> which is not an unreasonable conclusion to draw, given the dismissive tone of many evangelicals. The reason so many educated Russians had rejected belief in God altogether, according to W. A. Fetler, was simply because '... that form of faith, to which they had been accustomed to adhere, was too shallow to satisfy the deeper longings of their souls'.<sup>51</sup> Simply put, Orthodoxy had failed and evangelicalism could only succeed.

In the face of this ideological standoff, it is refreshing to find occasional accounts of more creative ways of interacting with Orthodox

<sup>48</sup> Pavlov, 'Pis'mo s puti', p. 24.

<sup>49</sup> Mazaev, *Vospominaniia*, p. 101.

<sup>50</sup> Wardin, *On the Edge*, pp. 335-36.

<sup>51</sup> Wilhelm Fetler, 'Russia and the Gospel', *The Missionary Review of the World* (October 1912), pp. 740-41.

clergy. In 1906 a reader of *Khristianin* wrote that a priest had lodged a complaint against him that he had uncensored books in his possession. Accordingly, the village constable seized the books and for about two months they were examined by police and clergy who finally determined that they were legal after all and returned them. The priest, however, was unhappy with this decision and convinced the man's neighbours not to let him use the village well. This was inconvenient for a brief time, but then the well dried up, which made the villagers angry with the priest! The evangelical man, however, prayed and dug another well on his own property. It turned out to be a very good well with four *sazheni* of water (about six metres). He concluded: 'I went to the priest and invited him to take even ten buckets of water a day from me'. Unfortunately, this offer did not soften the priest's attitude.<sup>52</sup> One can imagine evangelical readers saying, 'See? How else would you expect an Orthodox priest to react?' Yet, the man's simple, direct approach at least attempted to break through the antagonistic impasse by 'overcoming evil with good' (Romans 12.21).

Similarly, the end of the story of Agaf'ia Kapranova's 1911 preaching tour suggests that sometimes the oppression of evangelicals was overcome by simple decency on the part of the Orthodox laity. While Kapranova was being tormented in Staro-Pavlovskaiia by the ataman and the priest, help arrived in the form of a local merchant who also happened to be the ataman's god-father and close friend. The merchant's wife had sent him, insisting that Kapranova be released to him, personally, and not spend the night in the administrative office. In the morning Kapranova was sent to Piatigorsk and from there back to her friends in Prokhladnyi.<sup>53</sup>

In summary, during the 'fresh black bread' era, Russian evangelicals engaged the Orthodox both formally and informally, in organised debates and in everyday encounters. At least in the reports as they appear in the evangelical press, such meetings seem stiff and stylised. They were regarded as evangelistic or apologetic, whether for those engaged in the conversation or for their listeners. In terms of easing oppression, formal and informal conversations may have moved people to tolerate the evangelicals, or even persuaded them of the truth of their teaching. However, it would seem that the interactions rarely got beyond a basic exchange of assertions and counter-assertions. Genuine human relationships were subtler and reported on less often.

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<sup>52</sup> M. S. M., 'Iz Kamenets-Podol'skoi gubernii' [From Kamenets-Podol'skaia guberniia], *Bratskii listok*, No. 2 (1906), p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> N., "Izvestiia s nashego polia" [News from our field], *Baptist*, No. 43 (19 October 1911), p. 341.

## Conclusion

Between 1905 and 1914, Russian evangelicals enjoyed greater freedom than they ever had before. The preaching tour of Agaf'ia Kapranova in 1911 illustrates the new blessings of large gatherings, a church-based press, and opportunities to evangelise. However, evangelical believers also dealt with an unpredictable, intermittently oppressive situation, as the violence against Kapranova shows.

To cope with the complexity of their circumstances the Russian evangelicals employed various strategies. They documented cases of abuse and sought legal justice; they contributed to the legislative process; they made use of influential connections, both in their home country and abroad; they participated in debates that helped familiarise the public with their teachings; they spoke about their faith as the occasion arose; and sometimes they found creative ways to confront hostile neighbours. None of these strategies effected permanent or striking change, but they permitted survival and allowed the evangelical movement to grow.

Above all, their coping skills suggest a remarkable self-confidence and optimism. The Russian evangelicals expressed frustration with oppression, but they were far from passive and ground down, even pleading their case to the point of brashness. This is undoubtedly because they were convinced that they were the bearers of a message that the country desperately needed at a crucial moment. A letter to the journal *Bratskii listok* put it this way: '...the time has come for our tormented native land to shine with the light of the Gospel for the salvation of many, as a witness to the peoples...' <sup>54</sup> The evangelicals saw themselves as called by God to lift Russia out of darkness, and they were prepared to endure hardship in the process. Moreover, they regarded ultimate success as inevitable. As Fetler stated in 1911, 'I believe... that Russia is bound to become... the first nation in Europe for Baptist work and for Christian work, not excluding even Great Britain'. <sup>55</sup> To put it another way, the 'fresh black bread' was only temporary. Again, in Fetler's words, 'We will have the butter and cheese as well in the time to come...' <sup>56</sup>

Instead, however, rapidly unfolding international events required the evangelicals to return to their familiar diet of stale crusts. Four months after the beginning of World War I, nine evangelical leaders in Odessa were arrested and exiled to the Narym region of Siberia for preaching the enemy's

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<sup>54</sup> *Bratskii listok*, No. 1 (1906), p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> *The Baptist World Alliance Second Congress*, p. 23.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21. Note that the 'butter and cheese' analogy concludes hopefully, '...and I believe the Baptist World Alliance is going to help us get it'.



'German faith'.<sup>57</sup> Fetler left the country at about the same time. By the end of 1915 many more preachers were exiled and prayer houses were closed. There would be no more 'fresh black bread' until February 1917.

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<sup>57</sup> M. D. Timoshenko, *V Narymskii krai* [To the Narym region], (Moscow: Izdetel'stvo tipografii "Slovo istiny," 1917), pp. 11-24.

## The Orphans' Home of the Siberian Baptist Union (1917 - 1921)

Constantine Prokhorov

### Background

For several centuries, Siberia was a place of punishment for criminals in the Russian Empire. However, after the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of the people arriving in Siberia were voluntary migrants, who were united by the desire to acquire cheap plots of land there. In Siberia, fertile land was available to everybody – if not for purchase, then for rent. The 1889 law ‘On Voluntary Resettlement onto Treasury Lands by Rural Inhabitants and Lower Class Urban Dwellers’ as well as the beginning of the construction of the ‘Great Railway’ (Trans-Siberian Railroad) greatly increased migration flows to the Eastern part of the Russian Empire. The railway reached the Omsk area in 1894-1895, and from that time the mass colonisation of Western Siberia started.<sup>1</sup>

Among the settlers in the 1890s there were many ‘sectarians’, especially Molokans and Baptists. In contrast to the Orthodox population, the sectarian peasants were driven not only by economic factors but also by religious reasons as a motivation for their migration to the East. Numerous experiences of persecutions of the ‘Stundists’ as they were called (whose fault was usually only that they had left the Orthodox Church), were described in detail in serious historical sources of the early twentieth century. The persecution was carried out both by the Russian Orthodox Church and by the State.<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising that even economically prosperous, large sectarian families and sometimes entire communities in those years left their homes and preferred to re-settle in Siberia. ‘There are no priests there, just

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<sup>1</sup> For the combination of many causes that contributed to this process see, for instance, the following research: M. Churkin, *Pereseleniya Krest'yan Chernozemnogo Tsentra Evropeyskoy Rossii v Zapadnyuyu Sibir' v oVtoroy Polovine 19 – Nachale 20 vv.* [Resettlement of Farmers of the Chernozem Center of European Russia into Western Siberia in the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries] (Omsk: OmGPU, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance: V. Bonch-Bruevich, *Presledovanie Baptistov* [The Persecution of Baptists] (Izdanie “Svobodnogo Slova”, 1902); A. Koni, *Na Zhiznennom Puti: Iz Zapisok Sudebnogo Deyatelya* [On Life's Path: From the Notes of a Lawyer] (M.: T-vo I.D. Sytina, 1914), vol. I; V. Yasevich-Borodaevskaya, *Bor'ba za Veru: Istoriko-Bytovye Ocherki i Obzor Zakonodatel'stva po Staroobryadchestvu i Sektantstvu* [Struggle for the Faith: Historical and Every-Day Essays and Legislation Review of Old Belief and Sectarianism] (SPb.: Gosudarstvennaya Tipografiya, 1912).

the Kyrgyz!', they jokingly encouraged each other.<sup>3</sup> For the most part the believing immigrants were simple and hard-working people who supported each other in any trouble. This idealised view of them partly finds its confirmation in the fact that local authorities on the outskirts of Russia often considered sectarians as 'the best people for colonization'.<sup>4</sup>

Omsk Baptist Church was founded in 1897, in the old city, on the right bank of the Irtysh River. The first mention of the Omsk Baptist Church on the left bank of the Irtysh (the Novo-Omsk's or Kulomzino community) refers to 1899. In one of the reports of the Omsk Orthodox diocese of that year this was written:

On October 3, the missionary visited a sectarian plot of farmed land located 4 kilometers from the railway bridge during the prayer meeting of the Stundists. The meeting took place under the leadership of their false priest Prokudin. The total Stundists' number was up to 50 people.<sup>5</sup>

In 1917, the Orphans' Home of the Siberian Baptist Union would be built on this 'sectarian plot of farmed land', and its first steward would be the same presbyter Grigory Stepanovich Prokudin, who for the Baptist community was a true, not a false, leader.

Omsk Baptists had wanted to open a shelter for orphans as early as pre-revolutionary times. In November 1909, a regular Congress of the Siberian Baptists was held in Omsk.<sup>6</sup> At this Congress, among the honoured guests was Vasily Pavlov, the prominent leader of Russian Baptists. Among the decisions of the Congress, he highlighted the resolution on the establishment of a Siberian fraternal shelter for disabled people and orphans. One local community at that time expressed its desire to allocate a plot of land (several hectares) for this purpose.<sup>7</sup> Most likely, it was the community from the 'sectarian plot of farmed land' on the left bank of the Irtysh. To raise funds for the construction of the building and maintenance of the work, the Congress delegates decided to appeal to all fraternal communities in Western Siberia with a proposal for regular donations: from farmers – a pound of each wheat pood (16.3 kg) during the harvest, and from traders – a quarter of kopeck from each traded ruble. 'This solution is good', Pavlov wrote, 'God grant that it may be soon realized'.<sup>8</sup> However, it did not happen soon: the authorities gave their permission to build the Baptist shelter for orphans near Novo-Omsk (Kulomzino) only in 1917.

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<sup>3</sup> I. Bondarenko, "Odin iz Nemnogikh" [One of the few], *Baptist Ukrainy*, no. 10 (1927), p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> "Missionerstvo, Sekty i Raskol" [Missionary Work, Sects and Schism], *Missionerskoe Obozrenie*, no. 6 (1897), p. 529.

<sup>5</sup> *Omskie Eparkhialnye Vedomosti*, no. 22 (1900), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> In 1905 – 1927 congresses of Siberian Baptists were held in Omsk annually.

<sup>7</sup> V. Pavlov, "Pis'ma s Puti" [Letters from the Path], *Baptist*, no. 5 (1910), p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## The Foundation of the Orphans' Home in Kulomzino

During World War I the number of children who lost their parents dramatically increased, and the need for an orphanage was a pressing one. On 20 March 1917, in the atmosphere of freedom after The February Revolution in Petrograd, the Congress of the Siberian Baptist Union in Omsk took the long-awaited decision to build the Orphans' Home. At that time the brethren quoted the words of Christ: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven... And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me." (Matthew 18. 3,5) The leaders of the Baptist Union, Gavriil Mazaev and Andrei Evstratenko, reminded the brethren that the life of any person, even the most spiritual and pious one, is not in his or her power, and it may happen that our own children or grandchildren become orphans one day. In that case they will need help, too. The children who do not have their father and mother need a good Christian environment, food, clothing, and shelter. Who would take care of them, if not believers? The heartfelt speeches of the ministers touched the delegates of the Congress, and the brethren made the decision by a substantial majority to build the Orphans' Home.<sup>9</sup>

By 1917, many members of the Baptist community from the former 'sectarian plot of farmed land' had already moved to the city. However, the plot was useful, with picturesque views and wells with clean water. Therefore, when the March Congress began to discuss the place for the construction of the Orphans' Home, all agreed to buy from the owners of the old plot ten hectares of the land adjoining the wells.<sup>10</sup>

The acquisition of this plot of land and the preparation of documents, despite the relative freedom in Russia at the time, was not an easy task. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the summer all obstacles had been overcome. As approved by the Congress, ten hectares were bought for 1,500 rubles taken from the special Orphans' Fund of the Siberian Baptist Union. Elected in March 1917, the Construction Committee was headed by G. S. Prokudin. In order to speed things up, the Committee decided to find a finished wooden house in a nearby village (during the war many of them were on sale), take it apart, and move the parts to the new place. A house that was suitable in size and quality was found, but it was sixty kilometres from the site of the future Orphans' Home. Although this distance created additional difficulties, the believers decided to buy the house. Everybody

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<sup>9</sup> *Pervy Svobodny S'ezd Sibirskogo Otdela Soyuza Russkikh Baptistov v Omske* [The First Free Congress of the Siberian Department of the Union of Russian Baptists in Omsk] (Omsk: Zemlya i Volya, 1918), p. 76; *Soobshchenie o Sirotskom Priyute* [Report on the Orphanage], *Blagovestnik* (Omsk), no. 1 (1919), p. 11. See also: "Baptisty" [The Baptists], *Omsky Vestnik*, (19 August 1917).

<sup>10</sup> *Pervy Svobodny S'ezd*, p. 76; *Priyut dlya Sipot v Sibiri* [Shelter for Orphans in Siberia], *Gost'*, no. 9 (1917), p. 137.

liked it very much. The house was tall, of good wood, it included the main room (12 metres long and 7 metres wide) and a large outbuilding (13 metres long and 7 metres wide). Prokudin paid 2,200 rubles for this house. Its dismantling and cartage cost a further 595 rubles.<sup>11</sup>

The ceremonial founding of the house took place on 29 June 1917. Nikita Timonin, one of the active participants in this important event in the life of the Siberian Baptist Union, wrote:

An extraordinary amount of people gathered in the prayer house in Novo-Omsk. Entire communities came from the city of Omsk and the Omsk Station district. The house was overcrowded... but all the believers were happy. The Lord spoke his words of love and peace through the evangelists. Two choirs sang... When the meeting finished all moved to the place of founding [of the shelter], some of them on foot, others by horses, travelling 4-5 km from the city... In joyful communication with each other, collecting flowers along the way, the believers reached the groves, where... they sat on [previously prepared] benches and on the grass... 22 brothers in the Lord delivered their short speeches... All those present kneeled several times on the fragrant grass and lifted up their desires to the throne of the Lord. Because of his call, the purses of the believers had been also opened and the distributed envelopes had been quickly filled with money... Soon the neighbourhood will resound with the joyful cries of the children, and their life itself will confirm what was said about the Lord God, that he is the Father of orphans.<sup>12</sup>

The large number of believers who took part in this celebration (many of whom travelled a long way on foot), and their willingness to make donations and help in every possible way, indicates that the care of children was an all-embracing and 'holy' deed for Omsk Baptists. Therefore, it is not surprising that in November 1917 the Orphans' Home was already completely built. It had the following living spaces: an ample hall, two communal bedrooms (one for boys and one for girls), a kitchen, a dining room, a chamber for teachers and other staff, and outbuildings.<sup>13</sup> The shelter was designed for 30 to 35 children and five to seven members of staff.<sup>14</sup>

By the end of 1917 the Board of the Orphans' Home included: Andrey Evstratenko (Chairman), Gregory Prokudin and Anna Kiselevskaya (Heads of the economic department), Pavel Ryaboklyach, Kirill Gorbachev and Elizaveta Kolmykova (Board members), Anastasiya Loginova (Treasurer), and Robert Fetler and Pavel Ryaboklyach (Secretaries).<sup>15</sup>

After the completion of the construction of the Orphans' Home and provision of the necessary facilities in the rooms, the main items of

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<sup>11</sup> *Pervy Svobodny S'ezd*, pp. 76, 91; *Gost'*, no. 9 (1917), pp. 137-138.

<sup>12</sup> *Gost'*, no. 9 (1917), pp. 137-138.

<sup>13</sup> *Pervy Svobodny S'ezd*, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> The State Museum of the History of Religion (GMIR), F. 2, op. 16, d. 90, l. 6; *Blagovestnik*, no. 1 (1919), p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Pervy Svobodny S'ezd*, p. 93.

expenditure were food, clothing, and footwear for pupils; treatment of sick children; salaries for teachers and other staff; heating and lighting; school textbooks and manuals; care of livestock (belonging to the Orphans' Home); ice cellar, etc. Most of the pupils were children of Baptists who had died during the war.<sup>16</sup> Almost all of them were residents of Western Siberia. The exceptions were a few children who arrived from the starving capital, Petrograd, in 1918.<sup>17</sup> The children at the Orphans' Home were taught to read and write and taught arithmetic. They also had special classes where boys were taught carpentry and the girls learned knitting and embroidery. Traditionally, the older children helped the educators in the care of the younger. Everyone at the Orphans' Home received good Christian nurture.<sup>18</sup>

In 1919, the children's Christian songbook *Hosanna* was published for the Orphans' Home. One of the songs of this collection began as follows:

There is a Friend of young children  
High up, in the bright sky!  
He is faithful in his love to us  
And is righteous in his deeds.  
There is a holy shelter for children  
High up, in the bright sky –  
When they called on Jesus  
In their trusting hearts.<sup>19</sup>

These words were confirmed by the care and love with which Omsk Baptists treated the children who were left without parents. Below is only a part of the impressive list of donations<sup>20</sup> made during the official opening of the Orphans' Home on 22 November 1917:

G. I. Mazaev: cow, ten purebred sheep, two hens and rooster, bed with bed-clothes, clock, garden seeds, 50 rubles for the library, 50 rubles for washbasin, and 10 rubles for buying of samovar.

A. L. Lobacheva: cow, five sheep, ten hens, two beds with bed-clothes, hand sewing machine, large mirror, curtains and curtain rods, table, plates, knives and forks, 10 pounds of tea and coffee, 10 pounds of sugar, and 50 rubles for the library.

K. T. Lobacheva: cow, pood of butter, pood of soap, and 10 rubles for buying of dresser.

A. L. Evstratenko: cow, and bed with bed-clothes.

<sup>16</sup> According to one of the sources, the children of the Orphanage were later taken 'without distinction of religion and nationality'. See: "Baptisty" [The Baptists], *Omsky Vestnik*, 1918, July 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Blagovestnik*, no. 1 (1919), pp. 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> GMIR, F. 2, op. 16, d. 90, l. 3; *Blagovestnik*, no. 1 (1919), p. 12. In 1918-1919, the mentor in the Orphanage was the believing teacher A. Kuznetsova.

<sup>19</sup> *Osanna. Sbornik Dukhovnykh Pesen Dlya Detskikh Voskresnykh Shkol Russkikh Khristian* [Hosanna. A Collection of Spiritual Songs for Children's Sunday Schools of Russian Christians] (Omsk: Izdanie Soyuza Khristian-Baptistov, 1919), p. 90.

<sup>20</sup> Due to the noticeable devaluation of the ruble during World War I, anything useful in the household and livestock were considered as preferable donations at that time. The average salary of a common labourer in Omsk in the autumn of 1917 was 4 rubles and 50 copecks in a day. See: "Gorodskaya Duma" [Town Council], *Sibirskaya Rech'* (Omsk), 17 October 1917.

- E. G. Evstratenko: cow, sheep with lamb, and goose.  
 G. S. Prokudin: 10 books of the Gospels, bull, ten poods of oats, and 25 rubles for buying of samovars.  
 I. A. Romanteev: horse with harness.  
 Ya. I. Kravchenko: cow, three beds with bed-clothes.  
 Ya. S. Bulatov: cow, bed with bed-clothes, ten poods of potatoes, pood of oats.  
 E. V. Zabudsky: bed with bed-clothes, pood of honey.  
 Z. V. Smolensky: bed with bed-clothes, pood of kerosene.  
 Women's group and Youth Group of the Zhelannoe Village: bed with bed-clothes.  
 Youth Group of the Moskalenki Railway Station: bed with bed-clothes.  
 Ya. I. Busygin: bed with bed-clothes, half-pood of down for pillows, ten pairs of stockings, and 5 rubles for buying of kettle.  
 P. E. Evsyukov: 15 poods of flour, 20 poods of potatoes, and 15 poods of oats.  
 E. F. Krivoborodko: two hens and rooster, two ducks, bed-clothes, ten poods of wheat, five poods of flour, spoons, and 5 rubles for buying of hair clipper.  
 M. I. Kislyakova: sheep with lamb, bed-clothes, launder and washboard.  
 Community of the Solyanoe Village: twenty hens and rooster, bed-clothes, ten poods of flour.  
 Ya. I. Goncharenko: calf.  
 N. U. Bondarenko: calf, and 10 rubles for buying of hall-stand.  
 V. I. Kondrashov: cow, wash-basin, and 10 rubles for buying of cast-iron pots.  
 V. M. Podkovyrov: lamb, tree seedlings.<sup>21</sup>  
 V. K. Kiryushchenko: goat, two doves, and 3 rubles for buying of a pair of scissors.  
 R. I. Lyubchenko: two turkeys and gobbler.  
 G. V. Gryadunov: five poods of soap, five peaked-caps, cups, and 150 rubles for building of gateway.  
 F. G. Patkovsky: teaspoons, and 25 rubles for the library.  
 I. P. Nagorny: two geese.  
 P. I. Ryaboklyach: ventilators, planting stock of poplar and pine, and locksmith tools.  
 V. P. Semiletova: curtains and curtain rods for eight windows.  
 F. E. Sadov: ten pairs of stockings, four towels, and 25 rubles for bath.  
 M. P. Gladunov: twenty yards of canvas for towels, and 25 rubles for laundry.  
 V. F. Pichugin: 50 poods of wheat.  
 K. Yu. Eglit (shoemaker): 25 pairs of shoes.  
 F. D. Markov: cow.  
 G. Alexovich (prisoner of war, Hungarian soldier): 5 rubles for soap, and 3 rubles for buying of harmonium (by clubbing together).  
 T. I. Fetler (wife of Robert Fetler): 25 rubles for bath.<sup>22</sup>

The following is an extract from the list of cash receipts for the general needs of the Orphans' Home in 1917:

From the Office of the Association "Caravan"<sup>23</sup>: 765 rubles.

Youth Group of the Omsk Baptist community: 515 rubles.

<sup>21</sup> There is information that a garden was planted near the Orphans' Home. See: *Pervy Svobodny S'ezd*, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> *Pervy Svobodny S'ezd*, pp. 77-81.

<sup>23</sup> The Association "Caravan" belonged to the Trading House 'Wogau and Co.' and was engaged in selling tea and sugar in Omsk.

Christian Youth Group of the city of Omsk: 1000 rubles.  
 Omsk Children's Group: 99 rubles.  
 Omsk City Baptist Community: 714 rubles.  
 Omsk station Community: 213 rubles.  
 Kulomzino Community: 1000 rubles.  
 Usovo Community: 1933 rubles.  
 Evsyuki Community: 2310 rubles.  
 Isilkul Community: 590 rubles.  
 Nikolaevka Community: 480 rubles.  
 Zhelannoe Community: 452 rubles.  
 Bratolyubovka Community: 385 rubles.  
 Obolon' Community: 196 rubles.  
 Yur'yevka Community: 189 rubles.  
 Slavgorod Community: 180 rubles.  
 Novonikolaevsk Community: 178 rubles.  
 Slavyanka Community: 143 rubles.  
 Rasskazovka Community: 120 rubles.  
 Moskalenski Community: 100 rubles.  
 K. G. Gorbachev: 1500 rubles.  
 A. L. Evstratenko: 700 rubles.  
 Brothers Razvezev: 500 rubles.  
 I. A. Romanteev: 200 rubles.  
 A. H. Voropaev: 173 rubles.  
 S. V. Chernozubov: 100 rubles.  
 A. S. Anan'in: 100 rubles.  
 D. P. Semiletov: 50 rubles.  
 F. N. Kurbatov: 50 rubles.  
 Ya. I. Kravchenko: 50 rubles.  
 S. P. Gurov: 25 rubles.  
 Unknown brother: 15 rubles.  
 F. D. Markov: 5 rubles.<sup>24</sup>

It is remarkable that in these lists we can see the unity of very different people: rich and poor, adults and children, boys' and girls' Christian groups, and so on. And, of course, this is just a small part of what was done. Many donations were made anonymously. Therefore, it is safe to say that the children of the Orphans' Home near Novo-Omsk had all their needs provided.

The history of the Baptist Orphans' Home in Siberia – an institution far from politics – inevitably intertwined with a variety of events of that time. The tough terms of the civil war tied the hands of Admiral Kolchak, the Supreme Ruler of White Siberia with the centre in Omsk, in the sphere of human rights and freedoms.<sup>25</sup> Brutal suppression of the workers' (Bolshevik)

<sup>24</sup> *Pervy Svobodny S'ezd*, pp. 58-64, 89-91.

<sup>25</sup> During the reign of Kolchak, in February 1919, despite the official proclamation of freedom of religion in Siberia, the central Baptist prayer house in Omsk was taken for the needs of the military. Omsk Baptists then wrote complaints to Kolchak, even with the assistance of some Baptists in the United States. The help of the Western allies was vital for Kolchak, and, it seems, this was the main reason why the Baptist prayer



revolt in Omsk and Kulomzino on 22 – 23 December 1918 was an illustrative example of this situation. Among those who were executed at that time there were people not implicated in any way in the rebellion, including members of the Constituent Assembly (from among the people's deputies – socialists). Despite the fact that Kolchak himself in the days of the uprising was seriously ill and had no opportunity to lead the repressive actions, this story largely damaged his reputation and made a split in the anti-Bolshevik forces of Siberia.<sup>26</sup> According to the official data of the Kolchak government, 247 rebels were killed during the 'suppression of riots' in Omsk and Kulomzino on 22 December 1918. Another 166 people were shot on the verdict of the court martial, 13 participants of the revolt were sentenced to hard labour and imprisonment, and 24 persons were acquitted.<sup>27</sup>

According to the testimony of the inmates of the Orphans' Home of the Siberian Baptist Union, located just a few kilometres from the Kulomzino Station, the Kolchak soldiers in those days were looking for the workers, fleeing from the massacre, even in the vicinity of the former 'sectarian plot'. But the Orphans' Home itself did not arouse suspicions among the soldiers. The children, however, watched with fear and curiosity as armed men walked around. Whether any of the rebel workers hid in the Orphanage at that time, we cannot say for sure. There was such a legend in the Omsk Baptist Church, but what really happened we will probably never know. Omsk Baptists often helped people who were in trouble (not taking account of whether they were 'red' or 'white'), but they told little about it.<sup>28</sup>

## The Nationalisation of the Orphans' Home

The Red Army entered Omsk on 14 November 1919, and the situation of the Orphans' Home of the Siberian Baptist Union changed in the early 1920s. At that time all children's institutions in Western Siberia, including orphanages, passed under the control of the Soviet state, in the jurisdiction

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house, with official apologies, was returned to the legal owners in June 1919. See: *Blagovestnik*, no. 1 (1919), p. 6; no. 4, p. 45; *The Missionary Review of the World*, Sept. 1919, p. 712; Archive of the Omsk Central Baptist Church.

<sup>26</sup> G. Gins, *Sibir', Soyuzniki i Kolchak* [Siberia, the Allies and Kolchak], 2 vols. (Peking, 1921), vol. II, book 2, pp. 96-97; Plotnikov I. A.V. *Kolchak: Issledovatel', Admiral, Verkhovny Pravitel' Rossii* [A.V. Kolchak: Researcher, Admiral, and Supreme Ruler of Russia] (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2002), p. 123.

<sup>27</sup> "K Likvidatsii Omskogo Myatezha" [On the Liquidation of the Omsk Rebellion], *Sibirskaya Rech'*, 28 December 1918. See also: V. Zenzinov, *Gosudarstvenny Perevorot Admirala Kolchaka v Omske 18 Noyabrya 1918 Goda. Sbornik Dokumentov* [The Coup D'état of Admiral Kolchak in Omsk on 18 November 1918. Collection of documents] (Paris, 1919), p. 156. The data of Soviet historians usually exceed these figures.

<sup>28</sup> Testimonies of the old members of the Omsk church: V.N. Yuvzhenko (based on the memoirs of presbyter N.A. Kondrashov) and L.I. Arkhipenko (based on the recollections of evangelist I. Ya. Kravchenko) (Omsk, 2011).

of the provincial education departments.<sup>29</sup> At first, it was only a declaration; the actual situation was not changed immediately. For example, G. I. Mazaev described the situation in the spring of 1920:

The Orphanage... is registered with the government authorities, but for the time present everything remains in the same form and order, as before. There were 34 children when I left the Orphanage in March... All of them are healthy and happy... thank God! I'm glad for the Orphanage's sake.<sup>30</sup>

However, by the beginning of the summer of 1920 the Omsk Provincial Department of Public Education renamed the Orphanage of the Siberian Baptist Union, which became the [State] Orphanage No. 13, replaced the service staff, and ensured that the believers had no access to their former workplace and to the children anymore.<sup>31</sup> In August 1920, the Department raised the question of the dissolution of the 'former Orphans' Home of the Baptists in Kulomzino' and of the distribution of the children among other Soviet orphanages.<sup>32</sup> The condition of the state orphanages was poor at that time: their children were undernourished, they did not have the necessary clothes and shoes, they did not receive timely medical care and, indeed, crime flourished there.<sup>33</sup>

Under such circumstances, the Omsk Baptists made some desperate attempts to retain the Orphans' Home and to keep the orphans, who had been brought up in a Christian spirit for several years and were well supported by the communities' donations. Even under the Tsar's rule the persecuted sectarians, the Stundists, sometimes succeeded in achieving justice, but it was much more difficult under the power of the workers and peasants.

## Conclusion

Below are excerpts from a few letters of appeal which the Omsk Baptists sent to various authorities in the second half of 1920, as well as the Soviet officials' responses to them. The following serve as a summary of this article.

*August 17, 1920. To the Omsk Provincial Department of Public Education from the Siberian Orphanage of the Baptist Union, Novo-Omsk City.*

<sup>29</sup> "Narodnoe Obrazovanie. Detskie Doma" [Public education. Children's homes], *Sovetskaya Sibir'*, 1920, May 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Blagovestnik*, nos. 3-4 (1921), p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> GMIR, F. 2, op. 16, d. 90, l. 3. Apparently, at the same time the Omsk Baptists lost their control of the Fraternal Almshouse (a shelter for the elderly and disabled) that adjoined the Orphanage. See: "Baptisty" [The Baptists], *Omsky Vestnik*, 1918, 12 July; *Blagovestnik*, no. 5 (1919), pp. 55-56.

<sup>32</sup> GMIR, F. 2, op. 16, d. 90, l. 3.

<sup>33</sup> "Polozhenie Detskikh Domov" [The Situation of Children's Homes], *Sovetskaya Sibir'*, 1920, Nov. 21; A. Kravchenko, "Zadacha Dnya" [The task of the day], *Sovetskaya Sibir'*, 1920, Dec. 5; "O Detskikh Domakh" [On orphanages], *Sovetskaya Sibir'*, 1920, Dec. 14; etc.

The Siberian Baptist Orphanage was built in 1917... through voluntary donations of the communities of Siberian Baptists... The children living in it were brought from different communities. <...> (indicates section of original text omitted)

Currently, our Orphanage has passed under the control of the Department of Public Education, which intends to dissolve it... We don't agree with that. <...>

The children of Christian parents are deprived of Christian education. We think the very passing of the Orphanage to the Department of Education was unlawful. <...>

In the case of the dissolution of the Orphanage, the communities which sent the children here, will take them back. <...>

Signatures: Chairman of the Orphanage Committee – A. Evstratenko; Committee members – K. Chernikov, M. Kondrashov; Secretary – I. Kudelya.<sup>34</sup>

*On the original – there is the resolution (August 1920):* According to... the general policy in the matter of upbringing, the children's home must be administered by the Department of Public Education, and any religious [education] in it cannot be allowed... For the head of the department – A. Kotelnikov.<sup>35</sup>

*September 23, 1920. To the Siberian Revolutionary Committee,<sup>36</sup> the Department of Public Education, from the Council of the Siberian Baptist Union, Omsk, Myasnitskaya St., 1.*

According to the resolution of the regular Congress of the Siberian Baptist Union, the Council of the Union protests and appeals... against the taking... of the Baptist Orphanage located near Novo-Omsk (Children's home No. 13) by the Department of Public of Education. <...>

We have nothing against the observation of the Children's home implemented by the Department of Public of Education or other Soviet organizations, but we protest... against the nationalization of the Orphanage. <...>

We ask you... to return the Children's home No. 13 under the control of the Committee of the Orphanage, elected by the regular Siberian Baptist Congress, held with the permission of the Omsk Department of the Revolutionary Committee in June 1920 /Signed/.<sup>37</sup>

*October 8, 1920. To the Council of the All-Russian Baptist Union from the Council of the Siberian Baptist Union, Omsk, Myasnitskaya St., 1.*

Our Council of the Union asks you to make an application to the Central Institutions of the [Soviet] Republic for the returning under our control of the Children's home No. 13. <...>

<sup>34</sup> GMIR, F. 2, op. 16, d. 90, l. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., l. 3 reverse.

<sup>36</sup> The Siberian Revolutionary Committee was the highest organ of Soviet power throughout Siberia. In 1919-1921, it was located in Omsk. See, for instance: *Istoricheskaya Entsiklopediya Sibiri* [Historical Encyclopedia of Siberia], 3 vols., ed. by V.A. Lamin (Novosibirsk: Istoricheskoe Nasledie Sibiri, 2010), vol. III, pp. 105-107.

<sup>37</sup> GMIR, F. 2, op. 16, d. 90, l. 5.

The Orphanage is equipped for 30-35 children, and this maximum number of children constantly lives there. These children are orphans... of Baptist parents. The service of the Orphanage was made... by our Committee of 5-7 people. <...>

We sent our petitions to the Omsk Provincial Department of Public Education and the Siberian Revolutionary Committee, but received negative responses from them. <...>

Signed: Deputy Chairman P.E. Evsyukov and others.<sup>38</sup>

*October 1920. To Siberian Council of the Baptist Union from the Siberian Revolutionary Committee, Department of Public Education, № 6539, Omsk.*

Based on the decrees of 1918, published in Nos. 9, 18 and 62 of the Collection of Legislation under articles 126, 263, 685:

- 1) The affairs of upbringing and education are transferred from the Spiritual Department to the conduct of the Commissariat of Public Education ... with all movable and immovable property.
- 2) Teaching of religious doctrines in all State, public and private educational institutions... is not allowed. <...>
- 4) No Churches or religious societies have the right to own property.
- 5) All property of Churches and religious societies existing in Russia is now declared to be in the public ownership. <...>

The cumulative meaning of the above statements... leaves no room for any doubt that the upbringing of Baptist children placed in orphanages, as well as the management of these orphanages and their property, is entirely the responsibility of the State institutions of Public Education. <...>

Signed: For the head of the Siberian Department of Public Education Z. Vasiliev and others.<sup>39</sup>

In this way, the Soviet government, ignoring the complaints of the Omsk Baptists, quickly took control of their Orphans' Home – the house, about which the believers dreamed for many years, built 'by the whole world' and much loved. The Orphanage was operated by the Siberian Baptist Union only for about three years. In 1921, the Children's Home No. 13 was disbanded, and the building was used as an economic warehouse.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the closure of the former Baptist Orphanage was so rapid that the Omsk believers did not even have time to get permission to take all the children from the Orphanage and find them new homes or send them back to the congregations from where they originally came. Some of them, apparently, were sent to other Soviet children's homes.<sup>41</sup> One can imagine

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., l. 6.

<sup>39</sup> GMIR, F. 2, op. 16, d. 167, ll. 1 - 1 reverse.

<sup>40</sup> In the Omsk City Directory for 1923 another children's home – located on the Vozdvizhenskaya St. 48 – was already listed at number 13. See: *Ves' Omsk. Telefonny Spravochnik na 1923-1924 gg.* [All Omsk. The Telephone Directory for 1923-1924] (Omsk: Izd. F.G. Brekhova, 1923), p. 76.

<sup>41</sup> Testimony of V.N. Yuvzhenko, based on the memoirs of presbyter N.A. Kondrashov (Omsk, 2011).

what a tragedy it was for these young children. They were forcibly separated from each other, as if they were slaves. 'Blessed are the persecuted, for they are driven straight into the Kingdom of heaven!' said Alexander Dobrolyubov, the famous Russian sectarian poet.<sup>42</sup>

Although nearly one hundred years have passed since these sad events, Omsk Baptists have not forgotten the story. Among the members of the Central Baptist Church in Omsk, there are still some descendants of the inmates of the Orphans' Home in Kulomzino.

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<sup>42</sup> A. Dobrolyubov, *Iz Knigi Nevidimoy* [From the Invisible Book] (Moscow: Scorpion, 1905), p. 14. Cf. Matthew 5. 10.

## Evangelical Women in Western Siberia in the 1930s: Cases of Olga Aleinikova and Alexandra Semirech

Galina Prokhorova and Constantine Prokhorov

### Introduction

The significant preponderance of the number of women over men in congregations, or in ‘religious associations’, as the Soviet terminology in the USSR expressed it, is confirmed by many sources, and this was also evident in the Soviet Evangelical communities.<sup>1</sup> Although there has never been an official renunciation of marriage and family life among Russian Evangelical Christians and Baptists, in practice, especially among the female part of the communities, the number of celibate people has always been high, and such women often devoted themselves entirely to serving God. As a rule, women did not preach during the worship meetings.<sup>2</sup> However, in the difficult 1930s, when many men were repressed or fell away from the fellowship of the church because of their fear of persecution, there was a tendency for women’s ministry to become more important, including the participation of women in preaching. In this article, the role of women is illustrated by the example of two remarkable Evangelical women in the Omsk communities of both the Baptists and the Evangelical Christians in the 1930s.

### Olga Antonovna Aleinikova (1878-1938)

Olga Antonovna Aleinikova was one of the pillars of the Church of Evangelical Christians (followers of Ivan S. Prokhanov) in Omsk in the 1920s and 1930s, and she was a fiery preacher of Christ. Once, when she was told in a critical manner that sisters, according to the word of the apostle Paul, should not preach (I Corinthians 14.34-35), she answered with an embarrassed smile: “What are you saying? I do not preach, but *announce*...

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance: N. Belyakova and M. Dobson, *Zhenshchiny v Evangel'skikh Obshchinakh Poslevoennogo SSSR, 1940 – 1980-e gg. Issledovanie i Istochniki* [Women in Evangelical Communities of the Postwar Soviet Union, 1940 - 1980s. Research and Sources] (Moscow: Indrik, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> “40-letie Velikogo Oktyabrya i Evangel'skie Khristiane-Baptisty” [40th Anniversary of the Great October Revolution and Evangelical Christians-Baptists], *Bratsky Vestnik*, no. 6 (1957), p. 6; V. Kadaeva, “Uchastie Sester v Zhizni i Sluzhenii Tserkvey” [The Participation of Sisters in the Life and Ministry of Churches], *Bratsky Vestnik*, no. 1 (1988), p. 72.

As it is written: ‘Mary Magdalene came and told [in Russian Bible ‘announced’] the disciples that she had seen the Lord’ (John 20.18).”<sup>3</sup>

The archives of the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (the NKVD) contain an investigation in 1938 of Aleinikova. Within these files a researcher can find her brief autobiography. She wrote:

Before 1902, I lived in my father’s home in the Kvachi village of the Minsk province. My father was engaged in agriculture. In 1902, with my brother’s wife, I went to live in the city of Omsk, where I got married... My husband was a conductor on the Omsk Railway. In 1918 he was killed in a train. I have no more relatives. I became a member of the community of Evangelical Christians in 1926... I live in the city of Leninsk-Omsk, Zhelikhovsky St., No. 63... Since 1930 I have given my house for the conducting of services and meetings of the Evangelical Christians... In 1933, the OGPU [the forerunner of the NKVD] arrested me under article 58-10 for counter-revolutionary agitation, but a month later I was released.<sup>4</sup>

Olga Antonovna Aleinikova was arrested again on 28 February 1938. Under the investigation, she behaved with astonishing courage. She did not betray or slander anyone (though it is known how the NKVD interrogated people). For example, the investigation file of Aleinikova has records which show how she was being interrogated on 8 March 1938. The day was International Women’s Day, widely celebrated in the USSR. She answered to her tormentors:

*Question:* The investigatory powers have the information that you are engaged in preaching. How long have you been a preacher?

*Answer:* I was not a preacher of the Evangelical Christians, but... I completely believe in the teaching of the Gospel...

*Question:* The investigatory powers found that you provided illegal assistance from the funds of the [community] to those arrested and convicted of counter-revolutionary activities... When and to what extent did you render this?

*Answer:* I know only one such case, but I do not know the sum...

*Question:* The investigatory powers have proved that there was an illegal counterrevolutionary organization under the guise of your community, which included runaway kulaks, former White Guards, spies, and so on. Do you admit this?

*Answer:* The doors of our community are opened for all people who came to repent before the Lord God...

*Question:* You are arrested as an active participant in the illegal counter-revolutionary organization that exists in Omsk. I suggest you truthfully tell about the activities of this organization...

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<sup>3</sup> Testimony of the oldest member of the Omsk Baptist Church V.V. Abapolova (Omsk, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Archive of Federal Security Service in the Omsk Region, File P-4778, ll. 33-34.

*Answer:* To give such evidence, I'd rather accept death. I will not say anything... I will not say anything more to you, for you are antichrists, and I am a believer!<sup>5</sup>

If Russian Evangelical Christians were to canonise their martyrs for the faith, then Olga Antonovna Aleinikova would undoubtedly be one. Following her interrogation, and her brave answers, she was murdered by the NKVD on 21 March 1938. Many strong men under interrogation by the NKVD did not endure and were ready to sign any false evidence, but this woman showed an example of real courage.

In the second half of the 1930s in the USSR, when a simple visit to religious meetings aroused suspicion and was often viewed as a potentially criminal act, Olga Antonovna unhesitatingly provided her house for prayer services. At that time Soviet power viewed any religion as 'the only legally existing counterrevolutionary organization' which still had an influence on the people.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, religious communities were closed down under various pretexts. Formally, this state of affairs was in conflict with the Stalin Constitution of 1936, which proclaimed 'freedom of worship' in Article 124.<sup>7</sup> However, in practice there was a widespread attack on the church. Believers, for example, commented on their rights with the following words: 'You can pray freely but just so God alone can hear...'<sup>8</sup>

The authorities closed the community of Evangelical Christians in Omsk in the spring of 1938 – a little later than the closing of the local Baptist Church. In 1937, the followers of Prokhanov in Omsk officially numbered 160 members, while up to 300 people gathered for their Sunday services.<sup>9</sup> So the house of Olga Antonovna, who actively helped presbyters Kuzma Golubev and Peter Stepanenko (they also became martyrs for the faith),<sup>10</sup> was often overcrowded.

Here is the extract from the record No. 57 of the session of the NKVD troika in the Omsk Region dated 14 March 1938:

Investigation case No. 9409, the 4th department of the NKVD of the Omsk Region, on charges of Aleynikova, Olga Antonovna, born in 1878, from the kulak family, a preacher of the Omsk community of Evangelical Christians and the proprietor of the prayer house.

She is accused of being a member of the counter-revolutionary sectarian organization called the "Union of Siberian Brotherhood", in which she was involved, and which aimed to prepare an armed overthrow of the Soviet government. She provided her own home for prayer meetings of Evangelical

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., ll. 34 reverse – 36 reverse.

<sup>6</sup> *Marginaly v Sovetskom Sotsiume, 1930-e – seredina 1950-kh gg.* [Marginals in the Soviet Society, 1930s - mid-1950s], ed. by S. Krasilnikov and A. Shadt (Novosibirsk: Institute of History SO RAN, 2010), p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> *Konstitutsiya SSSR [The Constitution of the USSR]* (Moscow: Izd. TsIK SSSR, 1937), p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> A. Solzhenitsyn, *Collected Works*, 9 vols. (Moscow: Terra, 1999), vol. IV, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> File P-5381, vol. I, l. 98.

<sup>10</sup> Files P-5381 and P-662.



Christians. All the illegal meetings of the leaders of the counterrevolutionary sectarian organization took place here as well. She conducted counterrevolutionary agitation among townspeople against the Soviet power.

She admitted herself guilty only partially, but was exposed by the testimonies of her accessories.

Aleinikova, Olga Antonovna. should be shot. Her property and money should be confiscated.

The Secretary of the NKVD troika (the signature is illegible).<sup>11</sup>

Olga Antonovna was shot. During Khrushchev's 'thaw', on 15 May 1956, the presidium of the Omsk Regional Court fully rehabilitated her.<sup>12</sup> The house of Aleinikova has survived until today. The united Church of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Omsk carefully keeps the memory of this fearless evangelist. The yellow sheets of Aleinikova's file in the NKVD archive, with the records of investigators – intended only for their own narrow circle – have helped to bring to us today the evidence of her faithfulness to God.

### **Alexandra Ivanovna Semirech (1877-1962)**

Alexandra Ivanovna Semirech is the second person who in this article serves as an example of Siberian Evangelical women under persecution. Although she personally was not subjected to repression, she witnessed it in the context of external pressures and internal tensions, and she became one of the most outstanding Evangelical leaders in Omsk in the Stalin years. It is astonishing, but for the Soviet regime she was to some extent 'one of the lads', a real proletarian. Georgi Vins, who knew her well, wrote:

Alexandra Ivanovna Semirech... was a simple Russian woman, with a large face, stocky, with mighty health and a rough, almost masculine voice, at the same time she had a sensitive kind heart and deep sincere faith in God, she had exceptional courage and the ability to encourage timid and weakened Christians in the years of persecution.<sup>13</sup>

Alexandra Ivanovna was from Moskalenki (Omsk district). In the 1920s, she became a Christian. In 1930, together with her family, she moved to Omsk and joined the City Baptist Church.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note the testimonies of contemporaries not only about the spiritual, but also about the physical strength of Alexandra Ivanovna. For example, in Omsk, she worked for a while at a mill, where she easily lifted up and carried bags of flour

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<sup>11</sup> File P-4778, l. 101.

<sup>12</sup> *Zabveniyu ne Podlezhit. Kniga Pamyati Zhertv Politicheskikh Repressiy Omskoy Oblasti* [It Cannot Be Forgotten. The Book of Memory of the Victims of Political Repression in the Omsk Region] (Omsk: Omskoe Knizhnoe Izd-vo, 2000), vol. I, p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> G. Vins, *Vernye do Kontsa* [The Faithful to the End] (Korntal, Germany: Light in the East, 1976), p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> Archive of Federal Security Service in the Omsk Region, File P-5381, vol. I, ll. 18 reverse – 19.

weighing some poods on a par with very strong loaders.<sup>15</sup> The Semirech family settled near the Baptist prayer house, in Fabrichnaya St., No. 36. Alexandra Ivanovna and her husband raised three children. In the 1930s, two teenage sons lived with them, and their eldest daughter, in the early 1920s, married a military man and moved with him to the Far East. In the mid-1930s, Alexandra Ivanovna went to visit them, and to see her two grandchildren who were there.<sup>16</sup>

In May 1935, shortly after Easter, the local authorities seized from the Omsk Baptists their large prayer house on Myasnitskaya St., built by community funds in pre-revolutionary times.<sup>17</sup> In the summer of 1935, a cavalry platoon of the Omsk regional militia stayed in the building.<sup>18</sup> Because of this injustice, the believers decided to address their complaint to the All-Russia Central Executive Committee (VTsIK), the supreme body of the State power in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic at that time.

Not trusting the mail, the Omsk Baptists delegated two people to go to Moscow and to submit the petition on-site. The most courageous and worthy people were needed for this responsible mission. Alexandra Ivanovna Semirech and Petr Fedorovich Markov were chosen. At that time Christian meetings were held in their apartments, and they functioned as leaders offering a space for believers to gather and worship. The Baptist prayer house was requisitioned. However, some groups of believers gathered in secret, as fellowship is an essential element of Baptist spirituality. The homeowners themselves were preachers.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of 1935, Semirech and Markov visited the capital, where they gave the letter from the Omsk community to the reception room of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and then they learned that the Federal Baptist Union in Moscow no longer existed – the premises had been seized, and the members of the board arrested.<sup>20</sup> With this alarming news they returned to Omsk. The authorities did not return the Omsk prayer house.<sup>21</sup> The attack on religion in the country was in full swing. Many ministers were arrested or they hid in places where no one knew them. However, several dozen ordinary Omsk believers, divided into small groups,

<sup>15</sup> G. Vins, *Tropoyu Vernosti* [On The Path of Fidelity] (St. Petersburg: Bibliya Dlya Vsekh, 2003), p. 230. One pood is equivalent to 16.3 kilograms.

<sup>16</sup> File P-5381, vol. I, l. 8; Archives of Omsk Baptist Church.

<sup>17</sup> File P-5381, vol. I, l. 16.

<sup>18</sup> *Spisok Abonentov Omskoy Gorodskoy Seti* [List of Subscribers of the Omsk City Telephone Network] (Omsk, 1941), p. 96; Archive of Omsk Baptist Church.

<sup>19</sup> File P-4306, vol. I, l. 71 reverse; P-663, l. 145 reverse; Testimony of A.S. Danchevskaya (Omsk, 2011). P.F. Markov was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in 1937, he died in a labour camp.

<sup>20</sup> File P-4306, vol. I, ll. 73 – 73 reverse; File P-5381, vol. I, ll. 19, 28.

<sup>21</sup> The building was returned to the Omsk Baptists only in 1990.

even during the terror of 1937-1938 continued prayer meetings in private houses.

Lydia Vins, who lived with her son Georgi in the apartment of Semirech in Omsk, recalled:

When the difficult times for the church began, even though Alexandra Ivanovna's husband was an unbeliever, 10-15 people gathered in their house for praying and reading the Word of God. It is interesting that Alexandra Ivanovna's husband did not object to these meetings, and when he was sober, he greeted the believers very warmly.

However, this situation did not always exist. Lydia Vins wrote on the same page:

Her husband Roman Antipovich... worked as a carpenter at a construction site. He was of medium height, slim, with a very low voice... But when he drank, that happened often, he became like a wild beast: he was aggressive, fought, and swore... However, Alexandra Ivanovna quickly pacified her husband: she threw him on the bed and tied him with ropes by the arms and legs to the bed. At this time he cursed and shouted: "Lyaksandra! Let me go now, I'll give you what for!"<sup>22</sup>

Such was the background of some meetings of the Omsk Baptists at that time. Yet, in this epoch of mass denunciations in the Stalinist USSR, Semirech's husband did not give away the secret meetings of believers to the authorities, and no one was arrested in their house.

However, some members of the Baptist community, unfortunately, testified against their own spiritual leaders at that time. And in this situation, once again, the fearlessness of Alexandra Ivanovna was striking. Summoned as a witness to the 'Sectarian process' in Omsk in January 1937, she comported herself with dignity, and spoke only of the good things she knew about the accused brethren. She also helped the two fallen believers, who during investigations had betrayed their spiritual leaders and fellow church-members, to correct their serious mistakes.

This is what happened... In April 1936, NKVD officers arrested a group of Baptists in Omsk, headed by their ministers Peter Vins and Anton Martynenko. They were accused of anti-Soviet agitation during illegal meetings under the cover of religious sermons and of making plans for an armed uprising. The investigation continued until the late autumn of 1936. The charge was based on false testimonies of two people, also members of the Omsk Baptist congregation. The NKVD officers intimidated them and forced them to sign the protocols of interrogations, which were desirable for the investigatory powers. Vins, from the prison, managed to give his wife a brief description of his confrontations with the false witnesses and wrote

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<sup>22</sup> Vins, *Tropoyu Vernosti*, p. 230.

down their names – his message was written in indelible pencil on the inside of a small sugar sack, which Vins was allowed to return to his wife after having received one of her parcels.

Lydia Vins showed this message to Alexandra Ivanovna Semirech, and then a chain of amazing events took place, demonstrating the spiritual qualities and character of Alexandra Ivanovna. This brave woman, taking with her another sister in faith, visited in turn both the false witnesses. She shamed them with the words that for God ‘what is done by night appears by day’ and retold them the message from Peter Vins. This made such a strong impression on the false witnesses (who did not understand how everything had been revealed), that they immediately repented of what they had done and promised in prayer before God to speak only the truth during the upcoming court hearing. As a result, during the open trial in January 1937 in Omsk, the made-up charges against Vins, Martynenko and other defendants<sup>23</sup> regarding their counter-revolutionary activity completely disintegrated, and all of them were released.<sup>24</sup>

During Stalin’s time such an outcome was a unique phenomenon, and it could hardly have happened but for the courage of a simple believing woman – Alexandra Ivanovna Semirech. However, the political terror in the USSR had just started at that time, and soon almost all the believers released from punishment in January 1937 would again fall into the hands of the NKVD, and they would no longer be judged with the participation of defence lawyers and defence witnesses, but secretly – with the notorious Stalinist *troikas*.

## Conclusion

The stories of both these women, as described in this short article, testify to the spirituality and character of Siberian Baptists during times of pressure. The Evangelical conviction that Christian faith has to change a believer’s life and behaviour according to the shining examples of God’s people, revealed in the Gospel, became true and was tested in the years of political and atheistic persecution. Being faithful, standing for justice and unity, and being ready to suffer for one’s faith, if necessary, are some of the features in these stories. The concrete scenarios in both cases are, nevertheless, different. According to Georgi Vins, Semirech remained at large and lived a long life only because of her proletarian background and the fact that there was no informer in her immediate surroundings.<sup>25</sup> Aleinikova gave her life for her

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<sup>23</sup> In all, 11 people were accused in this case, most of them were Baptists.

<sup>24</sup> Based on the materials of the File P-663 and the memories of the Vins family. See: Vins, Tropoyu Vernosti, pp. 92-116.

<sup>25</sup> Vins, Tropoyu Vernosti, pp. 230-232.

faith in Christ, becoming a Baptist martyr, if we are allowed to use this terminology. Both Olga Antonovna Aleinikova's and Alexandra Ivanovna Semirech's witness form a powerful part of the story of the Baptists in Russia during the communist period.

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# **Totalitarianism and Emergence of Free Church Dissent: German Baptist and Mennonite Congregations in the USSR, 1942-1966**

Johannes Dyck

## **Introduction**

In the Soviet Union, the contradiction between a Free Church and an ‘unfree state’ took different shapes at different times. Before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Mennonites and Baptists of German lineage were tolerated in Russia. After the Revolution, they lost their privileged confessional status. Being native Germans with Soviet passports, they experienced some distrust, since they were part of a nation that had been an enemy during World War I. Nevertheless, German Baptists and Mennonites serve as a useful indicator of Soviet religious politics in regard to Free Churches.

## **Totalitarianism as the Conceptual Frame of This Study**

In defining the general context, this study follows the US-American political scientist, Juan José Linz, who distinguished two phases in Soviet history – totalitarian and post-totalitarian – marked by the death of Stalin on 5 March 1953 as a watershed. The main argument of this paper is that, in the area of religion, a transitional period between those two phases existed, that ended during 1965-1966. Moreover, during the transition, the state tried to push the Free Church into the status it had held during the totalitarian time, but instead produced a dissent movement as a reaction to oppression.

Linz used the definition of totalitarianism of Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, who specified the following attributes of totalitarianism:

- (1) a single strong ideology;
- (2) a single party committed to that ideology;

(3) a powerful secret police, as well as monopolistic control over (a) mass media, (b) operational weapons, and (c) all institutions, including economic ones.<sup>1</sup>

All these elements of power, perhaps excluding operational weapons, were directed in the USSR at religion in general and at the Evangelicals in particular.

The Soviet state distinguished, at least after 1922, between conforming and non-conforming religious communities by means of their registration with the administrative state organs. The first attempt to use this mechanism and to close all unregistered Evangelical churches dates back to the autumn of 1922,<sup>2</sup> but the Evangelical churches ignored the claim and continued to gather on a regular basis. At that time, the young state did not have enough resources to prevail in this matter.

The next level of pressure came in April 1929, when the executive branch of state power issued a law<sup>3</sup> about religious societies that contained many prohibitions, like declaring illegal every kind of special fellowship meeting of the Free Churches. Shortly afterwards, criminal prosecutions of believers went into a very active phase based on a special political article, No. 58 of the criminal code, positioning those convicted as anti-Soviet and anti-state persons.

The highest point of persecutions was reached with the mass execution of believers during the purges of 1937-1938. This eliminated the institutionalised religiosity among German Free Churches, and only a dozen or so Russian speaking Evangelical churches survived the purges.

## Post-War Suppression of Religion

A new era for religion in the USSR began on 4 September 1943, when Stalin met three Russian Orthodox Metropolitans and opened up a whole range of new possibilities for their Church. Both Russian and non-Russian experts

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<sup>1</sup> Juan José Linz, *Totalitäre und autoritäre Regime*, ed. by Raimund Krämer [Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes (Handbook for Political Science, Vol. 3, Macropolitical Theory, 1975] (Berlin: Berliner Debatte Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2000), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> A.I. Savin (ed.), *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i evangel'skie tserkvi Sibiri v 1920 - 1940 gg.: dokumenty i materialy* [Soviet State and Evangelical Churches of Siberia in 1920 – 1940s: Documents and Materials] (Novosibirsk: Posokh, 2004), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> 'O religioznykh ob"edineniiakh'. Postanovlenie Vserossiiskogo Tsentral'nogo Iсполnitel'nogo Komiteta i Soveta Narodnykh Komissarov RSFSR, 8 apreliia 1929 g. ["About religious associations". Resolution of the all-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR, April 8, 1929].

agree that one of the reasons for this was the use of the Orthodox Church as an instrument in Soviet international politics.<sup>4</sup>

One further reason for the apparent relaxation could be that thousands of churches of different confessions had reopened in occupied territories during the period of Nazi rule. The Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (hereafter CARC) that was created in May 1944 had the task, together with the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, of creating order in the religious landscape, including the freed territories. The creation of the CARC 'was aimed at certain curbing of the religious movement, its regulation and use of specific potential of religious centres', as it was officially expressed three years later.<sup>5</sup> The CARC reported to the Party's Central Committee, where the principal decisions were taken, and to the government. The CARC was responsible for the implementation of objectives set by those in the higher spheres of power; it played the role of a front desk and worked together with the local Party and administrative organs. The few available documents<sup>6</sup> indicate that there were more invisible actors on the religious front – in the form of secret police – but this sphere is not open for research at this stage.

Ideology was prevalent in the Council. In 1945, a report from the Omsk region in Siberia uncovered

anti-Soviet actions of certain sectarians of the Evangelical Christian and Baptist orientation. The latter performed impact on a group of kolkhoznik sectarians of the same orientation and created disruption of working days in a number of kolkhozes in Moskalenki District in conditions of preparations to spring agricultural works by observing religious days of rest.<sup>7</sup>

Most probably, this report is about celebrating Christmas. It also shows that even small groups in the countryside were carefully monitored by administrative and Party organs.

Totalitarianism would not be totalitarianism if the state did not provide mechanisms for dealing with the class enemy hiding under the mask of religion. A common religion suppression strategy, as in the case of the

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<sup>4</sup> Mikhail Odintsov, *Patriarkh Pobedy: zhizn' i tserkovnoe sluzhenie patriarkha Moskovskogo i vseia Rusi Aleksiia (Simanskogo)* [The Patriarch of Victory: Life and Church Service of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Alexi (Simanski)] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2015), pp. 306-321; Adriano Roccuchchi, *Stalin i Patriarkh: Pravoslavnaia tserkov' i Sovetskaia vlast' 1917-1958* [Russ. transl. of Adriano Roccucci, *Stalin e il patriarca: La Chiesa ortodossa e il potere sovietico 1917-1958* (Torino: Einaudi, 2011)] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2016), pp. 223-260.

<sup>5</sup> P. Vil'khovoy, *Evangel'skie khristiane-baptisty v SSSR i zagranitse* [Evangelical Christians-Baptists in USSR and abroad]. Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [State Archive of the Russian Federation], 10 January 1948. Document collection 6991, inventory list 3, file 52 (hereafter GARF 6991/3/52), pp. 20-87 (p. 84).

<sup>6</sup> For example: Sadovskii (ed.), *Priem u tovarishcha K.E. Voroshilova 4 ianvaria 1947 g.* [Reception by comrade K.E. Voroshilov, 4 January 1947]. GARF 6991/3/8, pp. 98-108 (p. 100).

<sup>7</sup> Extract from informational reports from commissioners concerning incitements and provocations to anti-Soviet actions. May 1945. GARF 6991/3/12, p. 81.



Evangelical Christians-Baptists (hereafter ECB), consisted first of all in creating a confessional centre with a strict internal hierarchy that could be controlled by the state. For the ECB this was the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (hereafter AUCECB), officially created in Moscow in October 1944.<sup>8</sup> No legal ECB church could exist outside of this structure, the offices of which were often called the 'Centre'.

The instrument of order was long-time proven: registration. In order to be registered, a local ECB church had to form a twenty-member founding group, a gathering room, and an AUCECB-recognised presbyter who must also be registered with the government. For the former occupied territories, the registration initially consisted simply of informing the authorities about an existing and functioning church. In the remaining part of the country, registration was a far more complicated process, often with a negative response. Here registration played a regulative role. Living as a non-registered religious community was dangerous: information on these communities should be passed to state security organs,<sup>9</sup> who regarded them as anti-Soviet and anti-state.

The AUCECB was involved in the process of church registration. Among others, the Centre was responsible for personal decisions – no local presbyter, or elder, could be installed without permission from the Centre.<sup>10</sup> The latter had to inform the CARC about the candidate. The CARC in turn checked them with local relevant authorities and notified AUCECB of a negative or positive decision.<sup>11</sup> In this way, registration put responsibility for conforming behaviour first on the local presbyter, then on the senior presbyter, and finally on the AUCECB. It seems that neither AUCECB nor the local ECB churches could be accused of making concessions ahead of time. For some time after the new beginning in 1944, they continued their work according to the traditional patterns of the 1920s. However, in 1949, the CARC set up a long list defining violations of the law 'under the cover of religious propaganda'.<sup>12</sup> Being afraid of losing their legal status, the AUCECB Centre obeyed the tightening demands.

Baptists were considered dangerous by the state because they were the only 'sect' that was still growing,<sup>13</sup> even under severe circumstances. In 1947, the CARC reported to the First Deputy Premier Molotov about 2,710

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<sup>8</sup> 'Vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie evangel'skikh khristian i baptistov v Moskve s 26 po 29 oktiabria 1944 g (zapisi zasedanii)' [All-Union Conference of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Moscow, 26-29 October 1944 (Session Recordings)], *Bratskii Vestnik* 1 (1945), pp. 11-38.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>10</sup> CARC Circular Letter, March 1945. GARF 6991/3/23, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Information Report to CARC from its Commissioner for Orenburg Region. 11 April 1949. GARF 6991/3/790, pp. 15-22 (p. 17).

<sup>12</sup> Short Review of the State of the Religious Movement in 1949. 7 March 1950. GARF 6991/3/63, pp. 50-78 (pp. 52-62).

<sup>13</sup> P. Vil'khovoy, *Evangel'skie khristiane-baptisty v SSSR*, p. 58.

working ECB churches, eighty per cent of them existing on territories occupied by the German Army during the war.<sup>14</sup>

The basic scheme to stop the ECB expansion was a systemic one. The CARC realised quite early that traditionally the Baptist 'sect' followed democratic rules. State officials put pressure on AUCECB that it should undergo a transformation into a centralised and strongly hierarchical system, following a strict administrative and organisational line; its regional senior presbyters should play the roles of Russian Orthodox Metropolitans and Bishops. Based on this model, a Baptist presbyter should play a role comparable to that of an Orthodox priest. The Church as a fellowship should be replaced by a place to satisfy individual religious needs.<sup>15</sup>

The year 1948 seems to have been a turning point in religious politics. The plans to establish Moscow as the centre of the worldwide Orthodox Church did not succeed. In October, Stalin personally repealed two earlier orders of his deputy concerning the registration of religious societies.<sup>16</sup> That meant the termination of the continuing legalisation of all kinds of religious 'cults'. After that, pressure on religion increased noticeably. To reduce ECB growth, the state stopped the registration of their churches, forcing the unregistered ones into permanent illegality. For the ECB, this decision was formulated already in the summer of 1947.<sup>17</sup> From that time, registrations of ECB churches became a rare exception until 1966, even if a considerable number of them were founded later due to revival or migration, or even just being discovered by the CARC.

The next phase of suppressing ECB pursued by the state was the reduction of the number of lay preachers. Ever since the Baptist beginnings in the 1860s, the Pietist practice of several short sermons during one service was standard in Baptist worship. The large number of ambitious preachers in a church constituted the real strength of the Russian ECB movement. But now, the reduction in lay preachers was carried out at the hands of AUCECB, which made many concessions in order to keep the churches and the Centre in Moscow legal. Already in September 1946 AUCECB demanded from its senior presbyters that 'in churches can preach only the presbyters or leaders and deacons, and as an exception well known in sound doctrine and strictly proven brothers and sisters'.<sup>18</sup> In 1947, the CARC strongly recommended AUCECB to accept a new statute which would officially state that a minimal

<sup>14</sup> I.V. Polianskii. Information to V.M. Molotov, 7 May 1947. GARF 6991/3/47, pp. 168-169.

<sup>15</sup> Sadovskii. Information to Voroshilov and Zhdanov, 10 February 1947. GARF 6991/3/47, pp. 33-38 (p. 35).

<sup>16</sup> Order No. 4055-1626c of Council of Ministers of USSR, 28 October 1948. GARF 6991/3/59, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> CARC Memorandum to V.M. Molotov, 7 June 1947. GARF 6991/3/47, pp. 196-201.

<sup>18</sup> AUCECB Circular Letter to Senior Presbyters, Sept. 24<sup>th</sup>, 1946. *Istoriia evangel'skogo dvizheniia v Evrazii 4.0* [History of Evangelical Movement in Eurasia 4.0] (Odessa: EAAA, 2005), Windows CD, file files/archives/1\_1/114.pdf.

number of preachers be included in church services.<sup>19</sup> In 1948, AUCECB indeed accepted the new statute.<sup>20</sup>

One more path of ECB membership containment was taken by the AUCECB itself, under pressure from the state: this was the demand to reduce the baptisms of young people under the age of twenty-five.<sup>21</sup>

The CARC believed that in three years it would be able to remodel the ECB movement from the ground up. In July 1947, the CARC reported to the deputy premier minister significant progress in liquidating democracy and installing a strong hierarchical structure in ECB churches.<sup>22</sup> The CARC anticipated a small amount of church opposition in the ECB community and even an 'insignificant' split.<sup>23</sup> However, the changes seem to have caused no significant protest, at least not publicly.

## German Believers in the Last Years of Stalin

Now it is time, in this article, to give some attention to the German citizens in the country. As is widely known, the citizens of German ethnic origin were in a very difficult situation, especially after World War II broke out. While most of them, since the autumn of 1941, lived in deportation scattered through the vast territories of Northern Russia, Siberia, and Central Asia, a small number of Germans still continued to live in their native villages founded before World War I. In contrast to their deported German fellows, they enjoyed freedom of movement.

In 1946, in several villages of the former Mennonite Neu-Samara colony in the Orenburg region, an Evangelical revival among young people took place.<sup>24</sup> In April 1946, the CARC commissioner for the Orenburg region was visited by a senior agronomist of an agricultural enterprise, Gerhard Derksen, who handed over to him a petition for registration of a Mennonite church in the village of Pleshanovo. It was signed by 174 persons from five neighbouring villages, mostly women; only thirty-three of the signed were men. The petitioners also asked for the return of the building of the former Mennonite church in this village. The commissioner reported this incident to Moscow, adding that Menno Simons was the person who had founded a

<sup>19</sup> CARC Memorandum. 1 July 1947. GARF 6991/3/47, pp. 202-223 (p. 215).

<sup>20</sup> Text: *Istoriia evangel'skogo dvizheniia v Evrazii 4.0*, file files/archives/1\_1/096.pdf.

<sup>21</sup> AUCECB Circular Letter to Presbyters, 6 March 1950. *Istoriia evangel'skogo dvizheniia v Evrazii 4.0*, file files/archives/1\_1/089.pdf.

<sup>22</sup> CARC Memorandum to Voroshilov, 30 August 1947. GARF 6991/3/48, pp. 82-84.

<sup>23</sup> CARC Memorandum. 1 July 1947. GARF 6991/3/47, pp. 202-223 (p. 215).

<sup>24</sup> *Neu Samara am Tock (1890-2003): Eine mennonitische Ansiedlung in Russland östlich der Wolga*, Jakob H. Brucks, Heinrich P. Hooge and Daniel Janzen (eds), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Warendorf, 2004), pp. 163, 167, 171, 174.

branch of Evangelism and Baptist movement among Germans.<sup>25</sup> In the same year, one more petition from ninety Germans from five other communes around the Klubnikovo village was received.<sup>26</sup> Until 1931, Pleshanovo had a Mennonite church and Klubnikovo had a Mennonite Brethren one.<sup>27</sup>

The local Party and administrative organs raised no objections to registering them as ECB, and the first reaction of the Moscow supervisors was cautiously positive. The alert commissioner, who in the meantime had collected more information about the Mennonites, once more interviewed the delegates about their position on non-resistance, discovered some uncertainty, and reported it to his superiors. Moscow revised its opinion and recommended to refuse the registration under an alleged pretext.<sup>28</sup> Subsequent petitions did not lead to a result<sup>29</sup> but only increased suspicion. Even requests to AUCECB to accept Mennonites into the ECB family did not save the situation.<sup>30</sup> Mennonites remained illegal and remained a test case for Soviet religious politics. In May 1951, in the Liuksemburg rayon of Orenburg (at that time Chkalov) region, thirteen Mennonites were sentenced to twenty-five years of labour camps. Among them was one woman.<sup>31</sup> In September 1952, twenty-one Mennonites from the Perevolotsk rayon of the same region were arrested and later sentenced to the same term. Among them also was one woman.<sup>32</sup> The picture in German deported communities was similar: a barely visible revival took place, but it had to survive under conditions of illegality. In some regions, this revival took place as early as 1942 behind barbed wire, like in Kimpersai mine<sup>33</sup>. In other places, for example in the Molotov region, they had a little more freedom and founded 'barrack fellowships' as Alexei Glushaev in 2012 aptly called them, after a Russian translation of Walter Sawatsky's book, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*.<sup>34</sup> In the Molotov region, three streams of Germans came

<sup>25</sup> Information Report to CARC from its Commissioner for Orenburg Region. 5 July 1946. GARF 6991/3/789, pp. 30-33 (p. 30).

<sup>26</sup> Information Report to CARC from its Commissioner for Orenburg Region. 14 January 1947. GARF 6991/3/789, pp. 40-47 (p. 46).

<sup>27</sup> Information Report to CARC from its Commissioner for Orenburg Region. 16 April 1947. GARF 6991/3/789, pp. 52-59 (p. 53).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 54; Response to the Commissioner, 7 May 1947. GARF 6991/3/789, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> Information Report to CARC from its Commissioner for Orenburg Region. 7 July 1948. GARF 6991/3/789, pp. 93-106 (p. 103).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>31</sup> *Neu-Samara am Tock*, p. 157; Heinrich Olfert, email to author, 11 September 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Johann Block, *Fjodorowka: Dorf Nummer „Sieben“: Orenburger Ansiedlung am Ural 1897-1992* (Brakel, 2014), p. 205; Heinrich Olfert, email to author, 11 September 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Ivan Shnaider, *Evangel'skie obshchiny v Aktiubinskoi stepi: Sto let pervoi obshchine baptistov v Aktiubinske* [Evangelical churches in Aktiubinsk steppe: One hundred years to the first Baptist church in Aktiubinsk] (Steinhagen: Samenkorn, 2006), pp. 80-85.

<sup>34</sup> Aleksei Glushaev, "'Bez propovednikov, v uglu barakov...': protestantskie "barachnye obshchiny" v Permskom Prikam'e 1940-1950-kh gg. ' ["Without preachers, in a corner of the barracks": Protestant "Barracks Congregations" in the Perm-Kama Region in 1940-1950s'], *Gosudarstvo, religiia, Tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* [State, religion and church in Russia and abroad], 3-4 (2012), p. 268.

together: in the 1930s, 'dekulakised' people; after 1942, Labour Army workers; and finally, in 1945, repatriates from Germany.

The first barrack fellowships in the Molotov region started in 1942.<sup>35</sup> Only in the summer of 1947 did they become an object of close attention from the security police,<sup>36</sup> and in March 1950 the elder of a Mennonite congregation in Solikamsk, Johann Penner, was arrested for performing a baptism.<sup>37</sup> After months of interrogation, in December 1950 he was sentenced to twenty-five years of labour camps for anti-Soviet propaganda and actions. In addition, four more Mennonites were sentenced to the same terms, while four more were on trial.<sup>38</sup> All in all, in the Molotov region eleven German believers were sentenced for long terms, mostly to twenty-five years.<sup>39</sup>

German believers in the Ural region were not an exception. In June 1951, a military tribunal sentenced five Mennonites in the village of Petrovka in the Karaganda region. One of them, Siemens, was allegedly recruited by British intelligence during his two-year stay in Germany in war time; according to the accusations, he founded the Mennonite church in the village, following British instructions.<sup>40</sup> In the Omsk region, twelve men were also sentenced to twenty-five years' imprisonment, the last one of them one month before Stalin's death.<sup>41</sup> This list is by no means complete. Belonging to an underground religious group was regarded as the highest anti-state crime.

The German victims of the totalitarian way of combatting religion represented just a fraction of the total number of prisoners. Because of closed archives, no reliable statistics are available, but two examples illustrate the extent of religious persecution in the last years of Stalin's rule. Susanna Neumann presented to the Hilfskomitee Aquila Historical Collection a group picture of twenty-six women in Karlag labour camp, taken in 1956.<sup>42</sup> All of them were sentenced to twenty-five years. Another labour camp,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Nemtsy v Prikam'e. XX vek, Vol 1: Arkhivnye dokumenty [Germans in Kama Region, vol. 1: Archival Documents], Book 2 (Perm, 2007), p. 226 with a reference to: Letter of the head of the propaganda division of the Solikamsk city Party committee to the head of the city KGB division, 16 June, 1947, Gosudarstvennyi obshchestvenno-politicheskii arkhiv Permskoi oblasti 1845/7/242, p. 143.

<sup>37</sup> Hermann Heidebrecht, *Fürchte dich nicht, du kleine Herde: Mennoniten in Russland und Sowjetunion* (Bielefeld: CMV, 1999), p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 170, 173, 188, 192, 195, 205-206, 208, 220.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Memorandum of the Supreme Court of USSR to VKP(b) Central Committee, 4 February 1952. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii 17/132/569, pp. 35-39. The author is grateful to N. Beliakova for directing his attention to this document.

<sup>41</sup> Petr Epp, *100 let pod pokrovom Vsevyshnego: Istoriia obshchin EKHB i ikh ob"edineniia 1907-2007* [100 Years in the Shelter of the Most High: History of ECB Churches and their Association in Omsk Region 1907-2007] (Omsk, 2007), p. 340.

<sup>42</sup> Hilfskomitee Aquila Historical Collection, photo nr. AB002981.

Steplag in Dzhezkazgan, had fifty-four ECB and Pentecostal inmates who even founded a church with an elected presbyter and regularly celebrated the Lord's Supper with smuggled-in wine.<sup>43</sup>

## Post-Totalitarianism and Free Church Dissent

After Stalin's death, the transition in religious politics lagged behind the overall societal transformation and was characterised by fluctuations in the course of the Party. In July 1954, more than a year after Stalin's death, the Party's Central Committee made its first statement about religion, and issued a secret decree about shortcomings in anti-religious propaganda.<sup>44</sup> Only four months later, in November 1954, the central newspaper *Pravda* published a Central Committee's prescript about errors in conducting scientific and atheistic propaganda among the population.<sup>45</sup> Now everybody, including both commissioners and believers in the country, could realise the fresh wind in the attitude of the state towards religion.

Changes in religious politics had been anticipated by some Germans a year earlier, just a couple of months after Stalin's death. On 2 July 1953, the CARC commissioner in the Chkalov region was visited by Peter Engbrecht, a former German language teacher from the village of Lugovsk. In a very confident manner he informed the official about his recent visit to the reception office of the head of the Soviet government and the CARC central office in Moscow where he was told that nobody can forbid Mennonites to gather for prayer meetings.<sup>46</sup> He handed over to the local official a petition signed by twenty-four persons for opening a Mennonite Brethren church in his village; the petition was based on Article 124 of the Constitution.<sup>47</sup>

Only three months later, the Chkalov region was visited by a CARC staff member. After a careful study of the situation with Mennonites in their villages, he invited Engbrecht to a conversation where, in the presence of the local commissioner, he explained to him that Mennonites can pray

<sup>43</sup> Stepan G. Dubovoi, *Nebesnye iskry ne gasnut* [Heavenly Sparks Do Not Go Out] (Harsewinkel, Bild & Medien, 2011), pp. 192-193.

<sup>44</sup> 'Postanovlenie TsK KPSS o krupnykh nedostatkakh v nauchno-ateisticheskoi propagande i merakh ee uluchsheniia' [CPSU Central Committee's Decree about major shortcomings in scientific atheistic propaganda and improvement measures], 7 July 1954, *KPSS v rezoliutsiiakh i resheniiakh s'ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK (1898-1986)*, 9th revised and expanded ed., vol. 8: 1946-1955 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1985), pp. 428-432.

<sup>45</sup> 'Postanovlenie TsK KPSS ob oshibkakh v provedenii nauchno-ateisticheskoi propagandy sredi naseleniia' [CPSU Central Committee's decree about errors in the conduct of scientific and atheistic propaganda among the population], 10 November 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 446-450.

<sup>46</sup> A.A. Murtuzov, Report about a trip to Chkalov region, October 1953. GARF 6991/3/791, pp. 172-188 (p. 186).

<sup>47</sup> Information Report to CARC from its Commissioner for Orenburg Region, 12 July 1953. GARF 6991/3/791, pp. 117-133 (p. 130).

unimpeded but privately in their homes. In the same sense, he commented on the recent speech of the Soviet representative Vyshinski to the United Nations about religious freedom in the USSR.<sup>48</sup> The post-Stalin political thaw did not reach Mennonite and German ECB congregations that emerged in many places, as a result of a post-war renewal.

Despite the hopes for changes in religious politics raised by the *Pravda* publication and some uncertainty among the CARC staff, the local religious politics actually did not change. Along with that, general political changes in the country led to two more developments: first, in 1956 Germans were set free from the limitations of deportation, which meant they were free to travel and choose a new place of residence within the Soviet Union, and, second, the early release of prisoners of conscience in 1954-1956.

The first development led to migration processes that in a couple of years formed a new German church geography, with centres in Central Asia and Siberia. With more freedom in the country, the German barrack fellowships began to dissolve into groups with quite certain confessional markers. The main dividing issue was adult baptism. Usually, Lutherans as well as ECB and Mennonites formed their own groups. Forming new churches meant also the forming of new leadership. Often this consisted of young men who had converted after the war and had a limited knowledge of the confessional tradition. The mode of German confession-wide cooperation from the 1920s that produced big Mennonite organisations like the Association of Citizens of Dutch Extraction or the German branch of the Baptist Union in Ukraine was unknown to them. The old German confessional frames and contexts of the 1920s ceased to exist; the new congregations became part of the larger Russian-speaking Free Church spectrum with its peculiar properties.

The German believers had several choices: to join the few existing registered ECB churches, or to join unregistered (i.e. illegal) churches, or even to create new ones, which also would be illegal. All registered ECB churches belonged to the AUCECB, with all state restrictions; the unregistered churches were illegal but free from internal limitations, such as the number of preachers or the age of baptism. Furthermore, the unregistered ones had no chance of being legalised, despite all their efforts, including even visiting the central CARC office in Moscow.<sup>49</sup> The state, at this point, in the 1950s, refused their registration.

The second development – early release of prisoners of conscience who came back with a sense of victory over the anti-God regime that had to

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<sup>48</sup> A.A. Murtuzov, Report about a trip to Chkalov region, p. 188.

<sup>49</sup> Notes on reception of a group of Mennonites from Karaganda in CARC, 26.11.1957. GARF 6991/4/75, p. 190.

admit their rightness – also had a strong effect on the ECB landscape. Usually they did not find acceptance in the legal AUCECB churches. They were even excommunicated by some of these churches,<sup>50</sup> because of their opposition to the existing leadership.

Beginning in 1954, an ECB spectrum parallel to the AUCECB began to develop visible contours – not limited by senior presbyters or fear of breaking the law and losing their registration together with their prayer houses. Part of the ECB was led by former prisoners, who were independent in their reasoning.<sup>51</sup> This also gave a chance to new, ambitious, and young leaders who did not fit into the AUCECB framework. Large inter-regional illegal gatherings with German participation outside of the AUCECB framework are documented in Northern Kazakhstan beginning in 1959,<sup>52</sup> two years before the 1961 ECB split.

Founding of new German churches in new places was encouraged by the indecision of the government. However, the silence of the CARC did not mean that on a local level religion received more toleration. Memoirs of German preachers describe this time as turbulent, with secret police officers trying to recruit agents in churches.<sup>53</sup> The indecision of the state, however, was short lived. In 1957, the local commissioners received an order from their Moscow centre to submit lists of violations of the religious law.<sup>54</sup> In 1958, the state started a new campaign of returning to ‘law and order’ in the area of religion. Pressure was exerted at all levels, beginning with AUCECB and ending with the children of believers in schools. AUCECB was pressurised by the CARC, as it had been in 1948, to accept a new statute. Its final version was signed by the CARC chairman himself.<sup>55</sup> AUCECB accepted it in December 1959.<sup>56</sup> Together with a Letter of Instruction, it produced a wave of indignation among a part of the illegal ECB spectrum that finally led to the formation of the Initiative Group in 1961 and later to the institutionalisation of the split in 1965<sup>57</sup>.

The state followed totalitarian patterns of combatting religion but the difference to 1948 was the new principle of the rule of socialist law in legal

<sup>50</sup> S.N. Savinskii, *Istoriia evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorussii (1917-1967)*, Part II (Sankt-Peterburg: Bibliia dlia vsekh, 2001), pp. 200-201.

<sup>51</sup> A. V. Sinichkin, 'Vlast' i sluzhiteli tserkvi na etape formirovaniia VSEKhB (s 1944-go po 1949 g.)' [Power and church ministers during the establishing the AUCECB], *Traditsiia podgotovki sluzhitelei v bratstve evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov. Istoriia i perspektivy: Sbornik statei*. [Tradition of minister's preparation within the ECB brotherhood: History and perspectives: Collection of articles] (Moscow: RS EKhB, 2013), pp. 148-162 (p. 149).

<sup>52</sup> Dubovoi, *Nebesnye iskry ne gasnut*, p. 245.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Gerhard Wölk, *Die sollen dem Herrn danken*, p. 175.

<sup>54</sup> CARC working plan for Q1, 1957, 8 January 1957. GARF 6991/3/145, pp. 3-4.

<sup>55</sup> Conclusion on the AUCECB Statute Project, submitted 11 February 1959. GARF 6991/3/184, pp. 58-68.

<sup>56</sup> Savinskii, *Istoriia*, pp. 201-208.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 232.



and court procedures with no longer any political paragraph 58 in the criminal code. Violations of the law were met by administrative measures and imprisonment. Using the length of imprisonment terms of three to five years as a reference point, its severity remained comparable to the beginning of the 1930s. Later, in 1965, the CARC counted 1,234 persons from different confessions who were prosecuted, 350 of them being ECB believers and Mennonites.<sup>58</sup> The oppression of religion between 1958 and 1964 demonstrated the persistence, and indeed the new energy, of the state to use totalitarian measures in their fight against religion.

However, Soviet society had also changed. The younger generation rediscovered the search for a feeling of personal freedom that earlier had been wiped out from their parents during Stalin's rule. The state had to learn that protest came from different directions, including the field of religion. The state politics produced a protest in the ECB spectrum that was unknown before. It took two more years until the CARC began to react and agreed to change the AUCECB statute. In October 1963, in an AUCECB conference that was renamed a congress,<sup>59</sup> the paragraph of limiting the number of preachers to a minimum as well as some other restrictive paragraphs were dropped from the statute.<sup>60</sup> Important elements of traditional Baptist democracy were restored.

The protest movement, from one side, used the demand for democratisation in the church. From the other side, it created an opposition with a non-divided authority and strong leadership, combined with secrecy that covered not only the whole activity before the authorities but also major parts of leadership decisions and work among church people. The mobilisation and protest potential of the protest movement was, for Soviet society, extraordinary. Andrei Savin noted that religious dissent in the country involved greater numbers and was better organised than the political protest movement.<sup>61</sup> According to AUCECB estimates, it comprised about ten per cent of the whole ECB community.

In 1964, the radical ECB wing launched a major protest action about the death of a neophyte Nikolay Khmara in prison in January of that year. This protest attracted the attention of branches of power that were not

<sup>58</sup> Note on the number of convicted and exiled in 1961-1965. GARF 6991/3/173, pp. 175-184 (p. 180).

<sup>59</sup> I.I. Motorin. Mandate Commission Report to the 1963 AUCECB Congress. GARF 6991/4/140, pp. 80-83 (p. 80).

<sup>60</sup> Statute of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in USSR, *Bratskii Vestnik* 6 (1963), pp. 43-47.

<sup>61</sup> 'K voprosu o religioznom dissidentstve rossiiskikh nemtsev v 1960-1980-e gody: postanovka problemy' [About religious dissent of Russian Germans in 1960-1980ies: problem definition], *Dva s polovinoi veka s Rossiei: aktual'nye problemy i diskussionnye voprosy istorii i istoriografii rossiiskikh nemtsev: Materialy 14-i Mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii, Kislovodsk, 25-29 sentiabria 2013 g.* [Two and a half centuries with Russia: actual problems and discussion topics in history and historiography of Russian Germans: Materials of the 14<sup>th</sup> International scientific conference, Kislovodsk, 25-29 Sept. 2013], pp. 531-541 (p. 540).

directly connected to the area of religion. As a result, the Supreme Court intervened, and in 1965 most persons imprisoned for religious causes were released and even rehabilitated. The CARC also reacted and decided to register exactly eight religious societies, including three ECB congregations<sup>62</sup> – a vanishingly small number of unregistered churches. Releasing from prison religious activists and not permitting them religious practices was *per se* contradictory but characteristic of the officials. The totalitarian patterns of prohibition of unwanted religious societies still dominated the religious politics. Even an audience of the opposition with the head of Soviet state in September 1965 did not have notable results and did not resolve their problems.

We can, however, assume that later in 1965 something happened in the depths of the Party and state organs. At the end of that year, two separate Councils – one for the Russian Orthodox Church and one for the ‘cults’, which meant for ‘protestant churches’ – were merged.<sup>63</sup> The new office, Council for Affairs of Religion (hereafter CRA), followed a new registration policy. Now all organisations who declared not to violate the religious legislation had a chance to be registered. This time, Mennonites represented a positive test case for the new registration policy and, at the end of 1966, the first two of their congregations were finally registered.<sup>64</sup> More followed.

What were the results of the transition period from totalitarianism to post-totalitarianism that, according to the present author’s evaluation, ended in 1966? The ideology as well as the secret police remained; the party remained the main decision-making body; but, at large, they lost control over the ECB movement. Not accidentally, even at the dawn of *Perestroika* in 1985, CRA tried to introduce new measures to fight radicals.

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<sup>62</sup> Vypiska iz protokola № 31 zasedaniia Soveta po delam religioznykh kul'tov pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR, 6 oktiabria 1964 g. [Extract from the CARC meeting, 6 October 1964], State Archive of Kyrgyz Republic, 2597/2/62, pp. 41-45 (p. 44).

<sup>63</sup> Resolution of Council of Ministers of the USSR from 8 December 1965 No. 1043. GARF 6991/6/1, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Minutes of the CRA meeting, 15 December 1966. GARF 6991/6/3, p. 63.

## Induced Spirituality: A Lesson from *Bratskii Vestnik's* Teaching on Preaching?<sup>1</sup>

Tima Cheprasov

### Introduction

I recall a conversation I once had with a pastor of a church in Russia on preaching ministry. This church was in deep crisis: it was losing members at an alarming rate, had no young people left on its pews, and its ministries were almost exclusively focused on several weekly worship services, despite their being poorly attended. I argued that they needed to revamp their preaching. I illustrated my point by referring to a couple of sermons from the recent service<sup>2</sup> that were extremely poor: the preachers' theological views were bordering on heresy, their ability to address the church's real issues was questionable, the response from the congregation was non-existent. The pastor's response struck me. He said, "But they are such spiritual brothers!" *Spirituality* covered a multitude of sins. The *spirituality* of these preachers was a lot more important than their message.

When considering the Russian Baptist emphasis on preachers' spirituality and faithful Christian living as the most important elements of successful preaching ministry, it might be helpful to refer to the Aristotelian concept of means of persuasion, which are *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. *Logos* covers every aspect of persuasion which appeals to reason, including logical argumentation; *ethos* is the element that helps to convince the audience of the speaker's integrity; and, finally, *pathos* serves as the emotional appeal, which is achieved 'primarily by describing something to which the audience will naturally have an emotional reaction'.<sup>3</sup> The approach of scientific atheism, that communistic authorities employed in their battle with the church, closed the possibility of advanced education for Christians, and created an anti-religious image for any academic work (the *logos* element of persuasion). Thus, the two other elements were given extra weight in Russian Baptist communities, compensating for the weakness of a rational component of sermons with the preachers' authority, established by their

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on material from my book *Like Ripples on Water: On Russian Baptist Preaching, Identity, and the Pulpit's neglected powers* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2018). Used by permission of Wipf and Stock Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> I have addressed the subject of Russian Baptist preaching in the context of traditional worship service in *Like Ripples on Water*, chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy C. Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1994), pp. 56-62.

faithful Christian living, and extensive use of stories, aimed at stirring the emotions of the listeners.

In this article I will use materials for teaching preaching from the official journal of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists or, in other words, the publication of Russian-speaking Baptists – *Bratskii Vestnik (BV)* [Brotherly Herald].<sup>4</sup> The importance of this media is difficult to overestimate, since until 1968 when the Bible Correspondence Courses started to work, the only resource available to churches and individual preachers were published articles in the *BV*. I will show how the oppressive environment in which Baptist communities existed, produced a distinct imprint on their preaching – the ministry of proclamation became over-spiritualised, with heavy emphasis placed on the spirituality and ethics of the preachers as the most important prerequisites for a successful sermon. Eventually, such a view of the ministers' spirituality gave preachers, and particularly the leadership of churches, a special position of authority, thus bringing issues of power into the realm of homiletics. The pulpit, from being the catalyst of the baptistic movement, became a sign of special anointing and authority for the chosen few, consequently limiting the right and desire of ordinary members to read and interpret Scripture. Individual theologies of the church leaders became a major factor in shaping various aspects of Baptist ecclesial life. Pastors turned into sole arbiters who defined preachers and sermons as appropriate or heretical, edifying the church or disrupting the congregation, as well as making decisions regarding worship practices, social ministries, and even matters of everyday life for their members. The unrestrained powers and the lack of accountability, which, to a certain degree, was caused by the absence of the congregation that could reflect critically and theologically on sermons or certain church practices, played a major role in the appearance of various abuses. All of these eventually led in many churches to the loss of people, and even to the general loss of denominational identity. The revivalist movement that aimed at reshaping all areas of Russian society has turned into a religious institution with rigid structures, practices, and traditions.

## **Trials and Tribulations: Living in a Spiritual Desert, 1929-1987**

Bolsheviks openly promoted atheism from the moment they gained power in 1917. However, until 1929, atheistic propaganda was promoted in a fairly peaceful fashion, at least when addressed towards Evangelical churches. It

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<sup>4</sup> I intentionally do not use sermons that were published on the pages of the *BV* for my study of the available preaching resources, as, whilst certainly used as preaching material, they were not used for critical analysis to advance preaching ministry in churches.

can be compared to a new religious movement that entered the country's religious scene, aggressively competing with the established players, and particularly the Orthodox Church. Of course, the competition was never fair, since the 'new religion' received extensive governmental support. In 1929 the authorities introduced legislation, clearly aiming at the destruction of all faiths. In the following ten years most of the country's sacred buildings were demolished or converted into shops and warehouses. The majority of Baptist pastors and active church members, together with hundreds of thousands of other believers, were arrested, sentenced to long imprisonment in remote areas of the Soviet Union, or killed. Their families lost their homes, could not find employment, and were therefore left without means of survival.<sup>5</sup>

The government slightly changed its destructive policies in dealing with Christians during World War II. This change was partly forced by Nazi attempts to win the loyalty of the population on occupied territories through allowing freedom of worship.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, a change might be seen as recognition that brutal force did not achieve the desired results – many people kept their Christian faith. For Baptists and Evangelical Christians, the change resulted in a merger into one union, the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians – Baptists (AUCECB), and the beginning of the publication of *Bratskii Vestnik*. However, Anton Komarov argues that the formation of the AUCECB and other signs of relaxation of persecutions were nothing but an attempt by the government to create some kind of ministry of spiritual affairs to execute better control from within the Evangelical movement, as some other non-Orthodox denominations were also forced to merge with the AUCECB (the Pentecostal church 'joined' the AUCECB in 1945, the Mennonites in 1966).<sup>7</sup>

Stalin's death (1953) marked an end of militant atheism and the beginning of the state's new approach to anti-religious oppression, the so-called scientific atheism.<sup>8</sup> The authorities focused on propaganda among

<sup>5</sup> Ivan S. Prokhanov, *V kotle rossii 1869–1933: avtobiografiia Ivana Stepanovicha Prokhanova s izlozheniiem glavnikh faktov dvizheniia evangelskikh khristian v Rossii* [In the cauldron of Russia 1869–1933: an autobiography of Ivan Stepanovich Prokhanov with the narration of main facts regarding the movement of Evangelical Christians in Russia] (Druckhaus: Gummersbach, 1992), pp. 246–249.

<sup>6</sup> Igor G. Ermolov addresses the question of the life of Russian Evangelical Christians on occupied territories in "Evangel'skii khristiane–baptisti v period okupatsii RSFSR 1941–1944" [Evangelical Christians–Baptists during the period of occupation of Russian Federation in 1941–1944], in *105 Let Legalizatsii russkogo baptisma* [105 years of legalization of Russian baptism]. Edited by Nadezhda A. Beliakova and Alexey V. Sinichkin (Moscow, RUECB, 2011), pp. 174–175.

<sup>7</sup> Anton Komarov, "Evangel'skii khristiane–baptisti v Sisteme Gosudarstvenno-Religioznikh Otnoshenii v SSSR: 1944–63 gg" [Evangelical Christians–Baptists in the system of State-Religious Relationships in USSR: 1944–63], in *Evrasiia: Dukhovniie Traditsii Narodov* [Eurasia: Spiritual Traditions of the Nations], Vol. 3 (2012), pp. 194–199.

<sup>8</sup> Lev N. Mitrokhin, *Baptism: Istoriia i sovremennost (Filosofsko-sotsiologicheskie ocherki)* [Baptist movement: history and contemporary situation (Philosophical-sociological articles)] (St. Petersburg: Rossiiskaia Khristianskaia Gumanitarnaia Akademiia, 1997), pp. 42–62. For an in-depth description and analysis of Khrushchev's anti-religious policies see Steve Durasoff, *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals*

young people, creating a perception that faith and science were in irreconcilable conflict. In addition, they introduced practices of public intimidation of children and young people from Christian families, at the same time imposing restrictions and limitations on all church activities related to youth work.<sup>9</sup> The authorities also attempted to discredit Christians by closing access to higher education, and work in such spheres as medicine, education, and art, leaving manual labour in construction, agriculture, and industry as the only possibilities for employment.

Alexey Sinichkin highlights a number of ways in which the government attempted to discredit the church: by policies it enforced on churches through its governing body (AUCECB and senior pastors), which included prohibition of leading services or performing baptisms for anyone without the Council's approval and accreditation; restrictions placed on youth work; encouragement of the use of church discipline (such as excommunication from churches on grounds of unchristian or immoral living); and many others. In their effort to control the ecclesial bodies the authorities even allowed the compilation and publication of the hymn-book in order to bring coherence into the lives of local churches (as well as removal of hymns which had ambiguous meaning and were thus potentially inappropriate from the state's perspective). There was also a recommendation to focus teaching and preaching on spiritual matters, rather than issues related to everyday living. The governmental department dealing with religious affairs went as far as recommending the authorities to allow Baptists to open a Bible school, which could train pastors with Soviet values, although these plans were eventually scrapped.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most significant consequences of atheistic propaganda was a widening gap between academia and churches. Historically, Russian churches were on the more conservative side when it came to anything introduced by educational institutions, whether secular or religious, despite a well-known proverbial saying 'Learning is light, whilst ignorance is darkness'. The roots of such perception of formal education can be traced to the period of the Great Reforms, when universities received the reputation of being faithless places of rebellious thinking.<sup>11</sup> Although the efforts of the

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*in the Soviet Union, 1944-1964* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), part IV; Alexander Popov, 'The Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the Soviet Union as Hermeneutical Community: Examining the Identity of the All-Union Council of the ECB (AUCECB) Through the Way the Bible Was Used in its Publications'. PhD Dissertation (IBTS, 2010), pp. 74-76.

<sup>9</sup> Olena Panich, 'Children and Childhood among Evangelical Christians-Baptists During the Late Soviet Period (1960s - 1980s)', *Theological Reflections* 13 (2012), p. 156.

<sup>10</sup> "Vlast i sluzhiteli na etape formirovaniia VSEKHB" [Authorities and ministers at the stage of formation of AUCECB], in *Traditsiia podgotovki sluzhitelei v bratstve evangelskikh khristian-baptistov. Istoriia i perspektivi: sbornik statei* [Tradition of preparation of ministers in the brotherhood of evangelical Christians-Baptists. History and prospects: collection of articles] (Moscow: RUECB, 2013), pp. 155-156.

<sup>11</sup> Prokhanov, *V Kotle Rossii*, pp. 51-52.

baptistic leadership at the beginning of the twentieth century in changing negative attitudes to theological training in churches started to bear fruit, Khrushchev's atheistic surge on churches rekindled mistrust and even hostility to formal education. Moreover, from that time, schools and universities were seen as places that cultivated an atheistic worldview, hence Baptist young people were discouraged from pursuing higher education.

Nonetheless, despite the challenges that churches were faced with, the authorities could not fully paralyse their activities in training the new generations of preachers. Many pastors (some had received training before the persecutions started in the late 1920s) were released from prisons and returned to their churches in the 1950s, giving a major boost to the evangelistic and educational activities of local churches.<sup>12</sup> Listening to sermons was the main means of education, as well as one of the main objectives of learning, since preaching was perceived as the most important skill that any pastor could acquire. Moreover, an ability to preach was considered as one of the key skills for any ministry – choir directors preached during rehearsals, youth workers proclaimed the Word at all youth events, including birthdays, weddings, picnics, etc.

The most common way for young people to learn to preach was self-training based on listening and reflection with little, if any, assistance from older brothers of the church. The proverbial saying, 'God is teaching his people to preach', was gradually becoming not only the way young people saw their ministry, but also the methodology promoted by pastors.<sup>13</sup> Eventually, in many congregations, the situation became the norm, where training was limited to asking every male member of a church to deliver a sermon (multiple sermons in every service provided ample opportunities for listening and preaching). Whilst learning through practice is essential when it comes to preaching, such important elements of educational process as subsequent critical evaluation and feedback were hardly ever present, hence severely restricting the potential development of prospective preachers.

The conclusion to this introductory part is rather simple: the tragic period of Communistic persecutions affected all spheres of Soviet society, penetrating and changing the lives of every family. Churches turned into targets for police violence and atheistic propaganda. Gradually Christians were pushed to the margins of society, and ordinary people were embarrassed even to admit that someone in their family attended church services. For the church it was a long battle for survival. When all educational activities were disrupted, youth work was prohibited, and social involvement was banned, the only area where believers could successfully

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoe dvizhenie v SSSR posle vtoroi mirovoi voini* [Evangelical movement in USSR after World War II] (Moscow: Garant, 1995), p. 185.

<sup>13</sup> Sinichkin, "Vlast I Sluzhiteli", p. 169.

resist the oppression was in their spiritual and ethical lives. During that time the churches' main approach to teaching the skills of preaching could be summed up in two phrases – to spend more time in prayer and to read the Bible.

It is important to note that, whilst the Soviet government, despite all its efforts, failed to defeat the church, the lasting period of oppression and hostility became a cause for drastic change in the church's understanding of mission, preaching, and its relationships with the wider society. I will develop this theme as the article progresses.

### **Biblical Exegesis in Post-War Publications**

The Scripture has always been of paramount importance for Russian Baptists, who learned to see almost every aspect of their personal and ecclesial life through the lens of the Bible. However, despite the emphasis on the Bible as the source and foundation of Christian faith, the subject of biblical interpretation received surprisingly little attention, because of a strong conviction that the Holy Spirit gives any born-again believer the ability to understand the Scripture. This view may seem not dissimilar from the biblical literalism of the first Baptist communities in Russia. The difference, however, was in the emphasis on the need for the interpreter to belong to the church, which had the final authority in accepting or rejecting the message, being the only agent that possessed the fullness of the knowledge of the Word. Whilst such congregational approval may appear as a sound practice of communal discernment, in reality the ultimate authority in matters of faith was given to the leadership of local churches. Thus, it was a step away from truly communal reading of the Scripture and towards uncritical reception of any message proclaimed by the preacher.

Ivan Motorin wrote a number of articles on biblical subjects, which appeared in the *BV* in 1946-1947. Although his articles resemble sermons both in style and content, they are helpful in shedding light on the role and the use of biblical text. In the article 'Bible – the Word of God' the author stipulates that the main God-given criterion for the reader/interpreter is to have a pure heart. The right heart leads to another crucial element of biblical interpretation – belonging to the church.<sup>14</sup> In turn, the approach to avoid is compared to the work of Pharisees or 'modernist theologians', who are people that study the Bible in seminaries and universities, have great knowledge but miss the most important element – personal regeneration.

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<sup>14</sup> "Bibliia – Slovo Bozhiie" [Bible – the Word of God], *Bratskii Vestnik*, 4 (1946), pp. 4–5.



Since they approach the Bible as a mere ancient text, rather than as God's revelation, such method is considered as 'exceptionally harmful'.<sup>15</sup>

Motorin offers a number of alternatives. The most significant aspect of biblical interpretation is that the Bible 'should be studied diligently, with especial eagerness and reverence, and most importantly, with prayer'. Other suggestions include to read the whole Bible; to study the Bible topically and to read available reference books; to study different sections of the Bible; to make notes, but most importantly to 'pray and reflect'. Only this allows the reader to 'enrich themselves with the divine truth and the knowledge of the eternal Word'. Finally, sharing the insights with sisters and brothers is seen as a good practice, since this is the way to deepen one's knowledge of the Bible and to receive necessary corrections, as the fullness of biblical knowledge and of discernment of God's will resides with the 'universal Church, which is the gathering of the saints'.<sup>16</sup> Yet, as Popov notices, 'there is little awareness of the universal church beyond the AUCECB [All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists], in the concrete historical setting about which he is writing'.<sup>17</sup>

*Exegetika* [Exegetics], a handbook of the Bible Correspondence Courses on exegesis, was the next significant work on the subject of biblical hermeneutics and exegesis. According to the authors of *Exegetika*, well-respected leaders Alexander Karev, Artur Mitskevich and Vladimir Popov, the person of Jesus Christ is the key to reading and interpreting the Scripture: 'The Holy Scriptures with all its immensity is composed following one plan – to testify about Jesus Christ. Therefore, an exegete must everywhere and always seek and see Jesus Christ, and hold His direction.'<sup>18</sup> Most of the Bible is considered to be clear for the readers, 'the Scripture should be understood just as it is written, which means all the words should be understood in their common sense, without over-intellectualizing. No doubt, God said in His Word exactly what He wanted to say.'<sup>19</sup>

The handbook suggested two types of interpretive tools – analytical and auxiliary. Analytical tools include the definition of the purpose of the book or a passage, the meaning of words and phrases, understanding the context, and biblical parallelism ('juxtaposition of two or more similar passages of the Holy Scripture in order to explain texts difficult for understanding').<sup>20</sup> Auxiliary resources are information about the author of the book, its characters and purpose, and the time and place when the book

<sup>15</sup> Ivan Motorin, "Kak izuchat bibliyu" [How to study the Bible], *Bratskii Vestnik*, 5 (1947), p. 58.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Popov, 'The Evangelical Christians-Baptists', p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Karev, Artur Mitskevich, Vladimir Popov, *Ekzegetika* [Exegesis] (Moscow: VSEKHB, 1966), p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 12–17.

was written. It is suggested that most of this information can be gained from the Bible, although additional knowledge can be received from the works of Christian theologians from the first four centuries. All of this underlines an important hermeneutical principle – the Bible is interpreted by the Bible.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly to Motorin, the authors of *Exegetika* address the issue of who can interpret the Bible. Their conclusion is that ‘an interpreter must be a child of God. Only such an interpreter possesses gifts which give him assurance in the work of interpretation’.<sup>22</sup> The authors then explain that differences of interpretations or even disagreements between the believers can occur if there has been no true regeneration of the interpreters, or due to the diversity of their life experiences, or existing differences in the level of their spiritual maturity.<sup>23</sup> However, as Alexander Popov noticed, ‘In practice, the demand of spirituality and holiness in the interpreters meant conformity of their interpretation to ideals, norms, and standards accepted among the “holy people.”’<sup>24</sup>

### ***Bratskii Vestnik* on Preaching**

The *BV* was one of the key instruments of developing preachers in churches. Every issue of the journal contained sermons and sermon notes of the leaders of the Baptist Union and other famous Christians. The sermons were read in private and from the pulpits, the notes were used for preaching. However, the purpose of such publications was to preach and impact people’s faith (hence produce good preachers) rather than to offer examples of ‘how to’ for analysis during preachers’ training. When it comes to articles on the subject of homiletics, from 1945 to 1989 there were fewer than fifteen such publications.

The *BV* publications on preaching can be mostly divided into two categories: those dealing primarily with the character of a preacher and those concerned with issues related to sermon preparation. The first category was given much greater attention, as almost every article contains extensive exhortation on the need to spend time in prayer before, during, and after the process of preparation for preaching, the importance of the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, and the prophetic nature of preaching. Despite some mild attempts to address practical issues related to the ministry of proclamation, the preachers and the listeners were given a clear message: the right heart of a preacher and his relationship with God are the most important elements for a successful sermon. Therefore, the task and responsibility of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 6, 17-21.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Popov, ‘The Evangelical Christians-Baptists’, p. 110.

the listeners is to come prepared not only to listen, but more importantly to hear God's message.

Two articles by Ivan Prokhanov, dealing with questions of a preacher's character, appeared in 1946. Prokhanov argues that preaching ministry should only be open to those who 'meet the criteria set by the Word of God', otherwise proclamation loses its ability to influence people. The author identifies four qualities that every preacher must possess. The first is *conversion*. The power of the personal experience of accepting Christ and turning away from sin is directly linked to the convictional power of proclamation. Without such spiritual experience, biblical and theological knowledge is considered to be lifeless scholasticism. The *calling* of a preacher, the second important quality, is confirmed by their preaching gifts. This confirmation, however, comes from a church, and not from a preacher. The third quality is *knowledge of the Bible*, which is different from 'theological theories' and other religious knowledge. Prokhanov believes that every preacher must try to memorise large bits of Scripture, which also would be a natural result of constant reflection on the Bible and its daily application. The final characteristic is a *preacher's life*, and preachers are urged to be an example for other believers in every aspect of their living.<sup>25</sup>

The editors of the *BV* extensively used Prokhanov's heritage – his sermons, articles, and even his preaching style were set as an example for other preachers. The article 'I. S. Prokhanov as a Preacher' is a lengthy analysis of his preaching style, full of flowery metaphors and flattering comparisons (Prokhanov as a preacher was compared and considered to be superior to Spurgeon, Moody, and Torrey). However, this ode to 'one of the greatest and most gifted preachers not only of our country, but of all countries in the world' sets a number of important emphases, which help us to understand what was expected of a sermon. The proclamation of the Gospel, understood as a call to repentance, was the first and foremost purpose of a sermon. Although the author indicates that preaching must also contain 'food for mind and heart,' nevertheless, the examples of the fruits of Prokhanov's sermons were always stories of people accepting Christ as their Saviour, asking for forgiveness, and bursting out in public prayers.<sup>26</sup> A sermon was, first of all, a tool for evangelism.

The article 'Some Instructions on How to Prepare for Preaching' again places significant emphases on the spiritual condition of a preacher. A preacher needs the help of the Holy Spirit. Without him, no correct interpretation or application of the Scriptures is possible. Hence, the process

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<sup>25</sup> Ivan Prokhanov, "Kachestva propovednika" [Qualities of a Preacher], *Bratskii Vestnik*, 4 (1946), pp. 18–21.

<sup>26</sup> N. N., "I. S. Prokhanov kak propovednik" [I. S. Prokhanov as a preacher], *Bratskii Vestnik*, 1 (1947), pp. 68–70.

of preparation should start and end with a lot of prayer. The author addresses such questions as preparation, reading the commentaries (indicating that reading parallel passages is the best way to understand the Scriptures), creating some structure, and following one theme.<sup>27</sup> Still, all of it does not distract a reader from the main idea that preaching is a prophetic ministry empowered through the work of the Holy Spirit:

After the draft of the sermon is ready, you need to throw it to the feet of Jesus and fall in front of Him. Your notes are just dead bones, which lack flesh and, which is more important – life and spirit, the source of which is in God’s hand. Pray to Him that in every moment of your sermon you, according to His promises, were given necessary thoughts in your heart and the words of life were put in your mouth.<sup>28</sup>

Motorin in ‘Preacher’s ministry’ addresses problems, such as powerless preaching and pastors’ integrity. He rebukes those who reject preparation on the basis of Matthew 10.19-20, reminding the readers that the passage relates to a court-room, and not to the context of a local church. The recommendations on how to prepare a sermon can be divided into three categories. Spiritual preparation involves reflection on a specific passage and prayer. Stylistic preparation highlights the need to be aware of gestures, choice of words, intonation, and general ‘appropriateness’ of a preacher in a pulpit. Those whose character or preaching style does not conform to I Peter 4.11, ‘If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God,’ are to be banned from this ministry.<sup>29</sup> Structural preparation insists on using notes, which help preachers to maintain clarity of thought and direction throughout the sermon. Motorin refers to the examples of Prokhanov, Kargel, and Pavlov, ‘who never preached without notes’. Finally, preachers are advised to use publications from the *BV*.<sup>30</sup>

A year later, a similar piece by Vladimir Schavelin, a preacher and the author of many publications in the *BV*, entitled ‘What a Preacher Must Know’, addressed similar issues of preparation (mainly through prayer and meditation), style, and the length of a sermon. However, the author places much heavier emphasis on the supernatural nature of preaching. The main themes of the article can be formulated through these quotations: ‘The preacher who is not in Christ always risks in his sermon to deviate from what the Holy Spirit wants’, and ‘Each preacher must daily, with prayer, immerse

<sup>27</sup> “Nekotoriie ukazaniia o tom, kak gotovitsia k propovedi” [Some instructions on how to prepare for preaching], *Bratskii Vestnik*, 2 (1948), pp. 53-56.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

<sup>29</sup> Motorin, “Sluzheniie propovednika” [Preacher’s ministry], *Bratskii Vestnik*, 1 (1954), pp. 43–44.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46. Based on this recommendation for preachers to use the *BV* as a source for their preaching, the subsequent issues of the journal regularly featured such sections as “V Pomoshch Propovednikam” [To Assist Preachers] and “Misli dlia Propovednikov” [Thoughts for Preachers]. These sections contained Karev’s notes for sermons, offering preachers ready-made materials for their use in churches.

himself into the abyss of God's wisdom and guidance.'<sup>31</sup> All the subsequent promptings to prepare, to be sensitive to the listeners, to notice the audience, are not substantiated in any way, thus conveying a clear message: the 'right heart' and solid relationships with God will inevitably produce an edifying message, that speaks to the hearts of the listeners, prompting their prayers.<sup>32</sup>

Yakov Zhidkov's article 'The Order of Preaching in Our Services' creates a framework for preaching in churches. All his recommendations are explicitly based on the document adopted by the council of AUCECB. The reason for such instruction is stated in the following way, 'We have to give guidance to our brothers, involved in the ministry of the Word, so that the churches would receive sufficient amount of spiritual food.'<sup>33</sup> I Timothy 4.11 and 6.2-5 are used to provide biblical backing for the above mentioned guidelines, some of which clearly have to be seen in light of the growing pressure from the Soviet authorities in their push to impose greater control over churches. First, it is clearly defined who is allowed to preach: the pastor, the deacons, and some brothers and sisters whose gifts are recognised by the church. These people must be members in their churches, as it is inadvisable to allow visitors to have access to the pulpit. Second, criticism of other religious movements or Christian denominations is prohibited. Third, the New Testament should be a primary source for preaching, whilst preaching on the book of Revelation and the Old Testament is discouraged (unless the preacher uses passages 'which are clear and do not require especial preparation for their interpretation'). Fourth, the use of stories and personal examples in preaching is commended, yet with a caution – stories must be 'appropriate, conforming to the serious spiritual content of a sermon'. Fifth, the preacher must prepare responsibly with much prayer, 'since believers expect to hear from him a spiritual word, as from the Lord.'<sup>34</sup>

The notion of preaching being primarily a result of the work of the Holy Spirit is further developed in the instructions to pastors. Evgenii Masin compares the ministry of proclamation to the ministry of the biblical prophets and the Apostles. The prophetic word is 'God speaking to the people of God', also it is 'the direction to the church, the light that shines in the darkness'.<sup>35</sup> Such a high view of preaching is reinforced by Artur Mitskevich in 'Priesthood of All Believers and Church Ministers'. The instructions on how believers should listen to sermons are worth an extensive

<sup>31</sup> Vladimir S. Schavelin, "Chto dolzhen znat propovednik" [What a preacher must know], *Bratskii Vestnik*, 3-4 (1955), pp. 69-72.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-72.

<sup>33</sup> Yakov Zhidkov, "Poriadok propovedi na nashikh sluzheniiakh" [The order of preaching in our services], *Bratskii Vestnik*, 3-4 (1955), p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>35</sup> Evgenii Masin, "Presviter dolzhen bit osviashchen Gospodom" [Presbyter must be sanctified by God], *Bratskii Vestnik*, 2 (1959), pp. 58-59.

quotation, because this message has become a regular theme for sermons in churches across the Soviet Union and today's Russia, first of all emphasising the responsibility of the listeners in discerning the message:

‘Watch, how you are listening,’ – said Jesus in Luke 8:18. Through preaching God performs His gospel seeding. Be watchful, open the ears of your heart, hear and reflect. Be like Mary at Jesus’ feet, place in your heart the seeds of eternal life. Do not sleep or doze, so that the evil one would not steal the seed planted in your heart (Matt 13:19). Do not let your heart become a transit road for various unclean or vain thoughts. Find pearls in what was said, wonderful truths, draw lessons not only for others, but also for your personal life. Do not set your heart for criticism or judgment. Reject everything which stands in the way of your reverent fellowship with Jesus, open your heart to Him, to receive new purification and sanctification, new joy and edification, new blessing for the continuation of your journey.<sup>36</sup>

An article by Sergei Fadyukhin, ‘Recommendations to Preachers’, can be seen as the sum total of the previous published materials. It is divided into three parts, each covering an important area of preaching ministry. Like most other preaching publications, it opens with the person of the preacher. The author states that the preacher’s integrity and personal experience are paramount for preaching ministry, ‘We, preachers, have no moral right to speak about something we haven’t lived through.’<sup>37</sup> The person cannot be a preacher unless he has had a ‘personal spiritual meeting with Christ’ and Christ’s personality is reflected in his life.<sup>38</sup>

A good knowledge of the Bible is included in the list of important qualities. This develops through reading and reflecting on the Scripture, and then presenting one’s thoughts to ‘senior, more experienced brothers’. Other steps to deeper understanding of biblical texts include understanding the context in which a particular text was written, and reading parallel passages, since ‘the best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible itself’. And the purpose of every sermon should be ‘repentance, revival, and strengthening of faith’.<sup>39</sup>

The second part of the article features the term ‘homiletics’ (for the first time in the *BV*), which is defined as developing and honing natural gifts of preachers such as public speaking and clear logical thinking. Preachers are advised on the choice of Scripture texts and recommended to use one of three forms of preaching: a verse by verse explanation of the biblical text; a verse by verse explanation, but with greater emphasis on one main idea; and preaching on a particular theme. The third form is deemed to be the preferred choice, yet also the most difficult one, since it requires the preacher’s

<sup>36</sup> ‘Vseobshcheie sviashchenstvo i sluzhiteli tserkvi’ [Priesthood of all believers and church ministers], *Bratskii Vestnik*, 3 (1965), pp. 30–31.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Sovety propovednikom’ [Recommendations to preachers], *Bratskii Vestnik*, 5 (1965), p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

extensive knowledge of the subject and ability to present his thoughts in a clear, logical sequence.<sup>40</sup>

The final part of Fadyukhin's article deals with various questions related to sermon preparation, such as the choice of preaching theme, understanding the audience, developing sermon notes, the length of a sermon, and the preacher's behaviour in the pulpit. However, despite some helpful and practical comments (e.g. preachers should welcome criticism, as it stimulates their development), the main idea re-emphasises the prevalent spiritualised view of preaching:

Each biblical text has rich content, for it is God's Word. However, when you consider it, you see that although this passage is beautiful, this beauty seems vague, leave the passage – this is not the text that God wants you to take for your sermon. The text gifted to you from God will be clear for your understanding and deep in its content.<sup>41</sup>

A short summary might be helpful this stage. I have offered an overview of the majority of articles published in the *BV* on preaching, covering the period from 1945 to 1969. Nearly all of these conveyed the unambiguous message that the most important thing in preaching is the preacher's spirituality. Personal spiritual experience, passion for Christ, time spent in prayer, reflection on the Word, as well as genuine desire to see people saved – these were the main prerequisites for a successful sermon. In turn, the listeners were taught that discovering precious pearls of God's truths was their responsibility when listening to preaching. Active listening (with prayer and reflection prior to the worship service) was encouraged, moreover, made a requirement for a successful sermon. Although the majority of Christian preachers would emphasise the importance of prayer and God's guidance in the process of sermon preparation, the over-spiritualisation of the practice that can be observed in the publications of the *BV* eventually led to lower standards of preaching in churches, as well as opening the doors to the abuse of power, since preachers – and particularly pastors – were given a special status of 'God's anointed people', and thus were exempt from any accountability.

The leadership of the Union was aware of the problems. Their dissatisfaction with the state of the ministry of proclamation can be seen in publications that attempted to mend poor preaching by engaging with questions of sermon preparation, structure, style of delivery, and by offering sets of sermon notes for the use in churches. Nevertheless, most of the recommendations these articles brought forward, such as to have clear structure in sermons, to read commentaries, to notice the listeners, only highlighted the need to rely on the Holy Spirit in preparation, since no

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 37–38.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

commentaries were available, the correct understanding and application of the Bible was understood to be purely a result of divine revelation, and the listeners were expected to make their own sense of what the preacher proclaimed.

## **Lack of Materials on Preaching in *BV*, 1969-1988**

After 1969 there was a period of seventeen years before the next article on preaching appeared in the *BV*. In order to understand such an apparent gap in dealing with an important issue, it would be helpful to address some of the matters the AUCECB had to face. The sixties turned out to be turbulent years for the Baptist Union. The approval of the controversial by-laws and the Instructional letter to senior presbyters in 1959 was the opening of a Pandora's box.<sup>42</sup> As noted by Karev, 'The storm that started in August 1961 surpassed all previous expectations.'<sup>43</sup> The split in the Union, the dissent of hundreds of churches and thousands of believers caused a significant shortage of qualified pastors and preachers. Several newly appointed senior presbyters had neither sufficient training nor experience. Hence, there was a growing number of churches with problems caused by leaders abusing power and doctrinal dissidence.<sup>44</sup>

The leadership of the AUCECB saw part of the solution in offering theological education and ministerial training to its pastors and lay members. In 1964, they applied for permission to publish 10,000 Bibles and to open Bible Correspondence Courses, which was granted. The first educational institution of the AUCECB began to operate in February 1968. The majority of the 100 students enrolled on the programme had various roles in their churches – senior presbyters, pastors, deacons, preachers. The two-year course included such disciplines as doctrinal theology, introduction to the

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<sup>42</sup> Under pressure from the Soviet authorities, in 1959 the council of the AUCECB adopted two divisive documents, "Polozheniie o Soyuze Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR" [The By-Laws of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in USSR] and "Instruktivnoie Pismo Starshim Presviteram" [Instruction Letter to Senior Presbyters]. Although these regulations, imposed by the Soviet authorities, clearly attempted to restrict church growth, they were approved and sent out to local churches. Some of the most controversial points were as follows: local churches were excluded from the election of the members of the General Council of AUCECB; senior presbyters were prohibited from participation in worship services on their visits to churches; a suggestion to restrict baptisms for people under thirty years of age, effectively a ban on evangelism and call to repentance during worship services; individual Christians were prohibited from participation in any religious activity outside of the registered church premises; people who were baptised by pastors or evangelists not recognised by the AUCECB were rejected. The introduction of these documents and rules caused a split in the AUCECB and the emergence of the independent Baptist Union – the Council of Churches. In 1963, these by-laws were annulled, and at the AUCECB congress in 1966 the leadership of the union issued public repentance. Nevertheless, until the present day, the relationship between the churches of the Baptist Union and the Council of Churches has not been fully healed. See *Istoriia Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov v SSSR*, [The History of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists in the USSR] (Moscow: VSEKHB, 1989), pp. 240–241.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p 238.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 7.



Old and New Testaments, homiletics, exegesis, history of Christianity, history of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, and others. Until the opening of Odessa Theological Seminary in 1989, the Bible Correspondence Courses remained the only educational institution of the Baptist Union, with more than 1000 students graduating through their programme over the years.<sup>45</sup>

1971 brought another major change. Alexei Bychkov was elected General Secretary of the Baptist Union after the death of Karev. Popov noted,

The death of Karev meant a complete shift of generations among the ECB leaders. Pastors who had seen the evangelical revival of the 1920s, had survived the Great Purge, and had laid the foundation of the AUCECB, were now succeeded by ministers raised during the post-war period. The new board of the AUCECB consisted of leaders for whom the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists was the only form of the evangelical movement they knew. On the one hand, the new leaders venerated their ancestors as those who had succeeded in raising the brotherhood from ruins to relative prosperity twice, after the October Revolution and later after World War II. Thus they showed extreme conservatism in almost all spheres of life, notably worship style.<sup>46</sup>

The conservatism to which Popov refers resulted in an almost total absence of educational materials from the *BV* during 1971-1988. The lack of theological education of the Union leadership caused increased emphasis on the value of spiritual formation, even at the expense of theological training, which is clearly observed in preaching.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

Throughout the history of Russian Baptists, different external factors made the church adjust its theology and practices to the changing cultural and political environment. At the early formative stages, baptistic preaching was characterised by heavy emphasis on moral living and projection of biblical narrative into the life of communities and individual Christians, as well as by criticism of the Orthodox Church. This was important as churches were learning to use the Bible as the main source for their faith and practice. The period of freedom and fast growth at the beginning of the twentieth century brought forward the need to deliver coherence into the teaching of local churches. This need was addressed through extensive publishing activities of Baptists and Evangelical Christians. Spiritual articles, sermons, theological materials – all of these were also used in preaching. Theological and ministerial training was of prime importance, and was rapidly developing, despite various barriers set by the authorities.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., chapter 7.

<sup>46</sup> Popov, 'The Evangelical Christians-Baptists', p. 85.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 179–180.

Spiritual formation and personal piety came to the forefront again during the time of persecution. The church lost its educational institutions and suffered a great loss of pastors and preachers. In such difficult times, the *BV* became the main source of theological and educational materials for the congregations across the Soviet Union. I have shown that most of its articles on preaching presented biblical interpretation and, more specifically, the ministry of proclamation as an impossibility without due spiritual preparation. Although some practical aspects of sermon preparation and delivery were noted, nonetheless it can be said that the journal played an important role in making preaching into a practice where the preacher's spirituality was given far more weight than any other aspect of this ministry. In churches, such views led to a situation when being a preacher primarily meant being an exemplary Christian, who spends a sufficient amount of time with God and the Bible. Gradually preachers were lifted to a special place of honour, as people especially close to God. The pulpit by itself became a sign of God's special calling and anointing.

Such an understanding of church leadership and its core ministry, the proclamation of God's Word, was alien to Baptists. Yet it would be wrong to suggest that these views were enforced by the Soviet government, since that would imply that the regime had a particular theological stance that it tried to bring into local congregations. The communistic authorities inflicted horrendous pain and suffering on churches, still they failed at reaching their goal, which was the destruction of the church. Nevertheless, their efforts have produced lasting consequences, affecting churches' understanding of spirituality, pastoral ministry, and of preaching.

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## Post-Soviet Transformation for Evangelicals, 1991-2018: Deepening Causes for Discord

Walter Sawatsky

### Surprised or Seeing the Continuities?

During the great transformation between 1989 and 1991, the majority of American journalists were completely surprised by the transformations of 1989 in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the USSR in 1991, since it contradicted their stereotypes so profoundly. Several developments within the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe turned out to be signposts for those with the eyes to see. Literary figures and philosophers circulating their thinking in *samizdat* form, or through the emergence of dissenting movements, pointed to the disillusionment with the grand socialist promises. Solzhenitsyn had already drawn attention in his Nobel speech to the power of truth in a climate where everyone was expected to live the lie. Czech playwright Vaclav Havel wrote an essay on the *Power of the Powerless*, also using Christian imagery to call for a societal moral recovery.<sup>1</sup> That the economies of the Soviet Union and many of the East European socialist states were slipping, rather than growing, was a spreading anxiety among the newer elite of the *nomenklatura*, including within the planning levels of the military. With the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev as general secretary after a series of old and tired Party rulers, his speeches and writing inspired ‘new thinking’, as did his close adviser Alexander Yakovlev, who had been a Russian diplomat in Canada for a decade. These new leaders called for a restructuring of the Soviet Union, for new thinking, for greater attention to values and for the spiritual, instead of crass materialism.<sup>2</sup>

Those observing the religious world did report a religious quest among the intelligentsia, by the mid-1970s flocking to a few reformist priests who spoke openly about a resurrection coming. The Reform Baptist movement, as well as dissident Pentecostals and Adventists, were not silenced by the 1960s’ campaign against religion. Already by 1976 the appeals to religious freedoms guaranteed in Soviet law, and the Soviet Union’s desire to be well regarded internationally, were having an impact. The number of evangelical

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s massive *Gulag Archipelago* had circulated in *samizdat* [self-publication], the Nobel Speech and his critique of state and church leaders circulated widely in many languages; Vaclav Havel’s *Power of the Powerless* was written at the time of the Charta movement of secular and religious dissidents, then became a widespread statement for the ‘velvet revolution’ in the Czech Republic, frequently reprinted.

<sup>2</sup> Then American Ambassador **Error! Main Document Only.** Jack F. Matlock Jr., ‘A Big Part in the Big Change’, *New York Review of Books* (23 June 2016), pp. 57-58.

prisoners of conscience began to decline toward the end of the 1970s and ended around 1985. Slowly, while state authorities over religion kept proclaiming there was no change in policy toward religion, the signs that the struggle to eradicate religious practice was not succeeding were mounting, so that some serious revision of the law on cults was anticipated. It came in 1990.

With that quick sketch I am trying to indicate that the new religious freedoms were not simply granted by the authorities; it was much more a story of more believers claiming religious freedoms and acting on the implications, with the state authorities hesitating in enforcing controls. In many work settings, administrators were openly saying that their believing workers were more reliable, persons they respected, in contrast to the nasty propaganda against them. Those social shifts toward a different way were tied closely to Soviet and global responses to the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe and an earthquake disaster in Armenia that made possible foreign aid, including by religious aid societies. There was a call for the return of the word *miloserdie* (Compassion) to Soviet society. Spontaneously up to a thousand *miloserdie* societies were organised and registered – invariably a mix of Orthodox and evangelical Protestant activists alongside secular people of good will.

## **Frenetic Evangelism, Fateful Transitions**

From the vantage point of hindsight, it is possible to speak of the quarter century of post-communism in several phases. Here I limit myself to developments among evangelicals and some Orthodox, and to note that there was an early desire to restore civil society, hence the emergence of non-governmental civil society projects of great diversity. In early 1989, on my first visit since 1980 to the USSR, our delegation of Mennonite leaders arrived in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, where we were permitted to drive as far as Tokmak and Rot Front, cities long closed to foreigners.

At the airport Andrei Barg, a Russian German minister in the main Evangelical Christians-Baptists (ECB) congregation, took me aside to drive me to the hotel, while other church leaders chauffeured my colleagues. We had met for fellowship more than a decade before, so we had much to catch up on. His opening remark was, “they called me in a week ago, but I refused to go”. I knew who the ‘they’ were, the usual officials including the KGB, who had harassed him throughout his ministry. But, said Barg, they said this was not a request like before; they simply wanted to talk with him, they wanted to learn. So he went to a meeting that included the mayor, school principals, the police, and Party leaders. They told him that their city too, like elsewhere across the Soviet Union, was struggling with serious social

problems. The list of woes included drug use, high divorce rates and a rising crime rate. On the other hand, they all knew that the Baptist youth were not like that. They knew about how they organised visits to lonely senior citizens to sing and pray with them. The Christian families impressed them by their treatment of each other, plus their readiness to help the poor around them. Therefore, the purpose of their request was to ask him what the secret of the Christian churches was; could he describe what they were doing and why? Could some of his colleagues come to speak in schools, or at factories, and answer whatever questions the listeners had?

This was only one striking illustration of what began happening across the USSR. Not only did thousands of Bibles get imported, it had also been a year to celebrate the millennium of Christianity. In Karaganda, Kazakhstan, I chatted with an evangelical believer who told me about the Orthodox priest who had looked frazzled but excited and eager to share. A retired couple had come to him to ask for a church blessing on their marriage of long ago. With them came their children, a legally married couple holding an infant. First the parents asked for baptism, then the priest's blessing on their marriage, before the priest performed a baptism of the infant, in each case taking enough time to explain what these rituals meant and to ask if they understood and affirmed them.

One Sunday in Moscow in 1990 I went to a nearby Orthodox parish for the morning liturgy where a bishop was presiding. After the highpoint of the liturgy – the Eucharist – the bishop came forward to deliver a short homily. “Most of you will have heard about the words Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and God the Father,” he said. “Today I am going to introduce Jesus Christ to you.” It sounded rather like that conversation in John 3 when Jesus explained the new birth to Nicodemus. In closing, the bishop invited visitors to come back next Sunday when he would introduce them to the Holy Spirit. How often have any of us had the opportunity for such basic teaching about Christianity as was then happening across the Soviet Union? It seemed as if everyone had seen the *Repentance* film, and could not forget that closing line by the old woman: “What use is a road if it does not lead to a church?”<sup>3</sup>

It was indeed a time of frenetic evangelism. Simple believers, not just the ordained ministers, seemed to get phone calls or people grabbing their arm in public to beg them to come to their village, to their school, even to the prison nearby to talk about God. The Baptist paper, as well as Semchenko's *Protestant* magazine were full of stories – about holding

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<sup>3</sup> The then Georgian Party Secretary Shevardnadze had permitted production, then as USSR foreign secretary encouraged Gorbachev to permit the showing of *Pokoiane* [Repentance] throughout the USSR. Tengiz Abuladze's film was made in 1984, but the release was banned until 1987, because of its allegorical critique of Stalinist, and in more general terms, a totalitarian regime. Premiered in 1987 at the Cannes Film Festival.

singing and preaching services in the prisons where they once had been imprisoned for their faith; visiting patients in hospitals who were surviving in unclean conditions; hospitals being short-staffed, with low worker morale. Soon in many places believers had become regular volunteers in hospitals and state-run orphanages and seniors' homes.

Already in 1990 the Mennonite Central Committee was able to set up an exchange of healthcare professionals. The head of the largest hospital in Moscow, a psychologist from that ill-famed psychiatric institute in Leningrad, and in total about a dozen nursing care and medical specialists toured the USA together for two weeks, visiting both state facilities and many of the Mennonite hospitals, mental health centres, and retirement homes to share insights and experiences. On Sundays the tour group members were taken to a half dozen different churches and had dinner with families. Six months later my wife Margaret and I travelled with the American/Canadian Mennonite professionals, first to tour the former Mennonite settlements around Zaporozhye, Ukraine, plus of course Kiev, St Petersburg and Moscow, before each of the visitors was hosted for a week to ten days in medical institutions in those capital cities just mentioned, but also in Odessa and similar cities. It was eye-opening on both sides, but in a number of cases, especially in the areas of social work and counselling centres that were just beginning, relationships of cooperation through mentorships continued for many years thereafter. It also served as a bridge between local Christians and such medical professionals, usually not practising believers, to establish friendships and organise volunteers as needed.

## **Parallels and Differences in Eastern Europe**

These forms of building new contacts and relationships were less dramatic across the East European countries, often having started earlier. The phenomenon known as citizen diplomacy had started at least by the mid-1980s. Once Polish General Jaruzelskii declared martial law around Christmas 1981, as a way to keep the Solidarity workers' movement within limits, President Reagan responded by imposing a sanction on the export of corn and soybeans to small farmers in Poland producing broiler chickens for urban residents. That winter chickens were quickly sold and such entrepreneurs became jobless; instead of chicken sandwiches there were mushroom burgers for sale. Then came a quick thaw along the Vistula River, broken up ice causing widespread flooding. The German authorities soon after approved sending food relief to the flooded regions, and church agencies from abroad, such as Caritas, Baptist World Aid, and my own Mennonite Central Committee were sending relief supplies.

Most memorable were the many German citizens who obtained addresses of churches or social centres to which they delivered truck-loads of supplies from their own towns in Germany. Then German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher announced that all relief goods brought to the German post offices would be shipped to needy places in Poland for free. This was a reconciliation and forgiveness moment between Germans and Poles, after the horrible memories of Nazi occupation, displacement of people in order to settle diaspora Germans from the Ukraine, as well as the ethnic cleansing of Jews. Some years later the Polish Catholic Bishops exchanged a reconciliation declaration with German Catholic bishops.

Elsewhere citizen diplomacy usually started locally. A group in a West European town sought out an East European town of similar size to establish a sister city relationship. That might mean sending football teams to play a tournament, visitors hosted in homes, then a return engagement in the other town. In other cases it was an exchange of hobby clubs, or even parish exchanges. I recall being a guest in a Protestant church in the Czech Republic more than a decade later, when their partner church from Munich presented a worship service with shared stories about church events in both places, then warm fellowship around a meal before the Germans drove home for the night. By then such cross-boundary, cross-cultural and cross-linguistic links had become normal.

An exchange student we had sponsored to study at Humboldt University in East Germany kept a diary of events during the fall of 1989.<sup>4</sup> It included excerpts from fellow student conversations, who were part of the Swords into Plowshares movement gaining force, not only concerned for ending the Cold War stalemate, which had prompted so many 'no future' placards in demonstrations. They also went regularly to the Monday evening worship service in Leipzig, followed by a candlelight march in the middle of the city. Sermon excerpts were from the Sermon on the Mount, then a new best seller in West Germany, plus quotations from Martin Luther King and Gandhi. They sang songs from the popular *Kirchentag* gathering started by lay people after World War II, when church institutions had lost so much trust. Social justice, peace, integrity of creation were common themes in those songs.

When the Berlin Wall came down, Vincent Harding, who had long headed the Martin Luther King Center in Atlanta, was watching events on television, surprised that the people were singing *We Shall Overcome* and *Go Tell it on the Mountain*.<sup>5</sup> That set him thinking and realising, as a modern

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Jantzen, *The Wrong Side of the Wall: An American in East Berlin during the Peaceful Revolution* (Newton, KS: self-published, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Vincent Harding, *Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990).

historian, that the human and civil rights movement was much bigger than merely in USA, that there was a solidarity globally that necessarily drew on the hope for the oppressed – the constant theme of Isaiah and Jeremiah and many others – and hope for the oppressed was in both the *Benedictus* of Zechariah and the *Magnificat* of Mary, and it was unmistakable in the life and teaching of Jesus.

So where was this taking the evangelicals of Eurasia and Eastern Europe? They turned their attention to marginalised fellow citizens. For East European Christians, as far back as the early nineteenth century, it was the Pietist Awakening that had led to the founding of long-term care hospitals for handicapped persons and for the mentally ill. Orphanages and training centres for street kids in the newly industrialising cities had sprung up. In areas where there were state churches or *Volkskirchen*, pastors, deaconesses, and other church workers were paid out of a church tax managed by the state. The two world wars of the twentieth century accounted for much of the destruction of such church-run institutions. It took half a decade before the formerly well-organised *Diakonisches Werk* of the Evangelical Church of Germany was finally able to resume activity for social needs inside West Germany, much less so in East Germany.

The recovery across the neighbouring East European church world took longer. A key challenge for free or evangelical churches was to function without state subsidy, relying on freewill donations. By 1989, when all of the East European states abandoned their socialist forms of governance, many industries and state corporations that managed the economy now tended to shift to free market economies. The transition was not as drastic as the privatisation process across the USSR, but it too did result in serious economic recessions.

So, in this context, one heard more frequently from the church leaders from Poland and Germany all the way to Yugoslavia, that the public began expecting the churches to care for civil society, at least for its marginalised people, to try to take on social ministries from the past, but now with voluntary funds. One can generalise that many Christians worked hard to assist their neighbours, but organised social services limped along, with international relief and aid agencies making major contributions during the 1990s, then a more widespread decline of charitable giving among developed societies became steadily more noticeable. This latter feature is now a common point of anxiety across east and west. Given that the second decade of the twenty-first century has seen the growth of a populism characterised by increased xenophobia to migrants and to other minority groups, with right-wing politicians more openly engaging in hate speech, the societal oppression of minorities is rising. What might cause a recovery of societal capacity for compassion?



## **Coming to Terms with Less – 1997-2008**

For the second post-communism phase I have arbitrarily chosen to cover the developments between 1997 and 2008. The revised Russian law on religion (1997) signalled the beginning of new (or was it renewed?) controls over religious practice, presented as an effort to block the foreign mission influence on Russian society. The Central Asian states produced their own contextually distinct laws that seemed like a return to the Soviet war on religion, but much more arbitrary. The changes in Ukraine and Mongolia were not as prominent, as was true in Eastern European states where the steady increase of majoritarian thinking was expressed more in nationalist or even racist tones, than specifically against religion. The beginning of a third phase during 2008 points again to the role of economic crises in shaping evangelical experiences, in particular the new isolationism over against the West (as then painted in the media in increasingly negative tones) and still no broad shared vision of the way toward a good and healthy society. Given the indicators of increased authoritarianism and corruption, it was not really a turn to the rule of law, it was a time for evangelicals and for many renewal-seeking Orthodox to turn inward, focused on ways to survive until the political and social winds might change, without a promising leadership waiting in the wings.

It was the contrasts between the euphoria of the millennium year, the high hopes that Russia, possibly all of Eastern Europe, would turn to God as source of hope and vision, and then the spreading sense by 2008 that the lights were slowly going out. In Russia, the Christian role in society was more obviously turning out to be used as sham: the hypocritical top politicians seen to attend worship, take communion, with Patriarch Kirill speaking more as voice for Great Russia than as church leader. By 2008, the enthusiasm for theological training, even, began to wane. What might someone with a Master of Divinity degree do after graduation, particularly if that did not appear to include salaried pastoral work? In places there was a backlash against returning seminary graduates who now sounded as if the theology from the West they had learned was the way of thinking all should adopt. One of those points of conflict centred on the teaching of eternal security that seemed alien to historic Slavic tendencies toward Arminian forms of Reformed theology.

In general, the value of theologically trained pastors needed to be learned by congregations through experience. Even the emerging emphasis on pastoral care and counselling, and on more participatory ways of doing Bible study, and on the voluntary social services in the community, were transformations needing a learning curve. Since the new ideas came from the schools and their teachers, to a great extent from foreign guest professors, what had not developed widely was group discussion and discernment at

both leadership level and congregational level, to gain consensus for direction and change.

## **The Evangelical Role in Unfriendly Societies – 2008 into the Future**

While teaching a short course, I was invited by Andrei Puzynin, then Rector of Realis in Kiev, to go for evening prayers to one of the new churches in Kiev, started by Western evangelical missionaries. It was drawing local professionals to become converted and apply their faith to their jobs as well as through a variety of community programmes from the church. Puzynin flagged down a private taxi, its mirror holding an icon and a cross, so Puzynin immediately started to converse with the driver. It turned out the young driver had encountered Orthodoxy and then become a Pentecostal, but he was no longer active religiously. I was reminded of the American phrase ‘been there, done that’; now he was jaded. They talked a bit about social and political changes; our driver had a university degree and, according to him, some of the changes were welcome, other aspects of the socialist system were preferable. So Puzynin invited him to come to the meeting where we were going; he could even come later after his shift, because there would be a fellowship hour with the band playing, and the people were young like him and friendly.

Around 2008, Nikolai Kornilov took me along on a Saturday morning (I had been teaching at Moscow Baptist Seminary that week) to a gathering of pastors, all of them leading new evangelical congregations in the distant suburbs surrounding Moscow. We started with personal sharing, and after a while I was hearing phrases that sounded familiar from pastors in the USA. Young parents were busy with jobs, trying to fix up their flats or apartments, spending time with their children and friends. They had been very enthusiastic as young Christians, doing many volunteer tasks in evangelism and social service, but now there was a change. Some were less frequent at Sunday services, needing to sleep in, tired from a busy work week. The years before there were always new people, the seekers, wanting to learn about Christian faith. That had ended, most were no longer interested, were returning to their usual Sunday rest times by washing the car and watching television. How were these pastors to encourage each other? At least they were sharing openly, some getting counsel from others on dealing with cases, but there was a pervasive sense that living out a congregation’s faith witness was again onerous and slow.

That was one form of encountering an unfriendly society, its reversion to living as if religion matters little for their daily affairs. Was this true in other cities, especially areas across Russia where the comforts of jobs and

availability of goods were more limited than was true in capital cities like St Petersburg, Kiev, and Moscow?<sup>6</sup>

What was changing in cities and their hinterlands in many parts of the Russian Federation and Central Asia, was a societal shift back to the command economy that the *perestroika* era was to eradicate. Local officials at many levels reasserted their suspicion of alien elements, such as the evangelicals who had the closest ties with the West that political leaders were now warning against. The capacity for extensive church ministries in the community was being blocked, there was eventually (2015) even a Russian law prohibiting missionising or evangelising outside religious buildings, and more obstacles permitting the functioning of religious institutions.

Franz Tissen, ECB President in Kazakhstan, is a long-time promoter of systematic expansion of evangelistic witness to every oblast in Kazakhstan, which resulted in numerous new congregations where worship then proceeded in Russian and indigenous languages. Tissen sent out an appeal, after the 2011 restrictive law on religion, to fellow believers now living in Germany, to pray for them since conditions for church practice were again more difficult. Congregations had to seek re-registration, with more stringent conditions to meet, such as size of community. *Forum 18* cited cases where the dissident ECB congregations that refused state registration, as before 1991, were being fined for unauthorised activities, leaders were arrested and given prison terms. The number of Jehovah's Witnesses refusing military service, and therefore arrested and sentenced to prison, was increasing from month to month. Then finally, in 2016, the Jehovah's Witness church in the Russian Federation was banned as an extremist organisation.<sup>7</sup> That action got noticed and reported in the West at least, with some dismay that a more authoritarian rule under Putin and his anti-Western rhetoric was reminiscent of old Soviet practices.

Yet the most severe treatments in the Central Asian countries seemed reserved for the most active Muslims, sentenced to severe fines and prison terms for having or distributing published Islamic theology by Said Nursi, for example, on grounds that such Muslim behaviour was 'extremist' or 'terrorist'. So new or old forms of persecution of faith practice were

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<sup>6</sup> Several scholarly attempts to assess the evangelical role in the post-soviet era have been published, that I warmly recommend since I lack space to cover them: *Forum 18, Dvadtsat' let religioznoi svobody i aktivnoi missii v postsovet'skom obshchestve. Itogi, problemy, perspektivy evangel'skikh tserkvei* [20 years of religious freedom and active mission in post-Soviet society. Results, problems, perspectives from the evangelical churches] (Kiev: Dukh i Literatura, 2011, 28 contributors from Ukraine and elsewhere). See also Joshua T. Searle and Myhailo N. Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope. Mission, Theological Education, and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> An online weekly newsletter *Forum 18*, March 5, 2018, reported 24 criminal convictions for religious activities in 2018 alone, with more imminent. *Forum 18*, January 31, 2018 presented a detailed list of '279 administrative prosecutions', 259 of them receiving punishments of fines, short term jail terms, temporary or permanent bans on religious activity, deportations, seizure of property and religious literature.

returning, even the prominent Orthodox churchmen no longer protested. In October 2017 Kazakhstan's Religion and Civil Society Ministry published a draft of revisions to the 2011 Religion Law, with restrictions on parents' and children's freedoms, more restrictions on sharing belief, and more censorship. In so doing it was ignoring the legal recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. It referred to a comparative table to show similarities and differences with such laws in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>8</sup> That may sound bureaucratic, but what it implied was that Kazakhstan was still less actively controlling religious practice than was the case in traditionally more actively Muslim societies.

To stick with recent summaries of reporting of violations of religious rights, *Forum 18* in October 2017 reported cases of torture in city after city in Uzbekistan, that included beatings, freezing conditions, and sexual violations including raping of women – those reporting insisted on remaining anonymous because of likely reprisals by the state. Officials denied charges, some even stating that they would not be punished if reported. *Forum 18* also noted that a review by the UN Committee on Torture spoke of 'torture or the threat of it' as 'routine' in 2007. In that organisation's later concluding report of 2013, it spoke of

numerous, ongoing and consistent allegations that torture and ill-treatment are routinely used by law enforcement... [that] leads to a climate of impunity for officials and the absence of the rule of law ...[plus] unjust trials with flagrant breaches of due process...<sup>9</sup>

In Tajikistan, nearly 2,000 mosques were closed and converted to secular uses in 2017, always with the claim that it was 'at the request of local residents'.<sup>10</sup> There had been many thriving evangelical congregations in Uzbekistan during the last few decades of Soviet power, and a seminary/college was opened in the 1990s. Yet at a Bible School in Kazakhstan around 2007, where I was teaching, about a dozen students from Uzbekistan attended, since the school where they had studied was closed.

It was a new time of testing the quality of faith one claimed, of testing one's readiness to show solidarity to oppressed minorities. Given the shift to independent national ECB unions, also true of other evangelical communities, the structures for information sharing were missing, and gradually, stronger evangelical communities in Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova were less able to send assistance, including literature.

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<sup>8</sup> *Forum 18*, October 10, 2017, giving extensive detail.

<sup>9</sup> *Forum 18*, October 12, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> *Forum 18*, February 26, 2018.

The revised law on religion of 1997 in Russia, occurred in the context of a politically inspired turn against the West, and its missionaries. The length of visas for foreigners in Russia was steadily reduced, until such residents were required to exit and return every three months, soon a financial impossibility for missionaries, less so for business persons. Many affected negatively by the new restrictions of 1997 sent appeals directly to the President without response, and the anti-West atmosphere was such that the Duma approved the restrictive legislation that included a variety of increased anti-terror surveillance measures, as well as close supervision of the missionaries' activities. Soon most of the mission agency offices in Moscow had closed, leaving the Russian evangelicals with a more pronounced sense of isolation and minority status.

### **Evangelical Discord: Is There a Better Way Forward?**

During earlier periods of faith testing under Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev, too often this was followed by discord within evangelical circles. These were times when it seemed more certain what belonged to Caesar, to whom one could not give ultimate allegiance, and what belonged to God and one dare not violate one's conscience. So there had been patterns of capitulation to the atheist campaigns, and patterns of resisting and suffering the cost. In the post-war revival era, many of the new evangelical converts were really those who had surrendered to the forces of evil, who repented and found the gift of forgiveness, of divine grace, and increasingly the gift of Christian fellowship to help them face a society still seriously hostile to Christian faith.

Soon after Vladimir Putin was appointed by Yeltsin as his successor (1998), large sections of the Russian population, including evangelicals, became more aware of the close links between Russian Orthodoxy and the Russian state. Putin was shown on television taking communion in the Cathedral of the Savior, with Patriarch Kirill officiating. In connection with Putin's increasingly frequent references to a form of Russianness that included all 'Russians' in the 'near abroad' for whose welfare the Russian state had obligations, to the point of the right to interfere in the independent countries such as Ukraine for the welfare of the Russians there, an ethnic majoritarian emphasis seemed troubling. Early in the new century, Patriarch Kirill seemed to have changed his earlier inclusivist approach, to articulate a doctrine of Russian Orthodoxy. Whether this was in the vein of the surprising claim in Kirill's 1994 mission declaration about canonical territory that belongs to Russian Orthodoxy, or if he was feeling pressure from brother bishops to stay in step with President Putin's national notions is not clear. But it has been the Russian evangelicals, as fully Russian/Soviet in identity

since at least 1950, who have struggled with national identity. According to Romans 13 understanding, some church leaders, such as Riakhovsky of the national Pentecostal Union and chair of the inter-evangelical council through which evangelicals negotiated with state officials, began sounding uncritically pro-Putin.

In Ukraine, there had been political divisions behind the demonstrations at the Maidan square in Kiev, soon known as the ‘Orange’ Revolution because of its non-violent style, including with clergy and lay Christian mediation between groups. When it became apparent that the Ukrainian President, whose electoral victory was under challenge, was corrupt by enriching himself and secretly negotiating for the Russian commercial union, the second Maidan demonstration became the focus for forcing President Yanukovich out, and he sought sanctuary in Russia. Then followed the election of Poroshchenko (June 2014), a Ukrainian oligarch with a successful business, but with a prime minister with pro-American leanings, and during the interval the temporary state President was Oleksandr Turtchinov.<sup>11</sup>

Turtchinov had converted from his youthful role as Komsomol leader to baptism and membership in a Baptist church, where he took his turn as lay preacher, then also wrote three novels, similar in apocalyptic tones to the American *Left Behind* series President George W. Bush enjoyed reading. Among Turtchinov’s main anxieties was the rise of a world government, as so many fundamentalist evangelicals have imagined the United Nations to become, or in Russia currently the rising influence of President Putin toward leader of a new Byzantium, a third Rome.<sup>12</sup> Turtchinov, as deputy to Julia Tymoschenko, leader of the Fatherland Party, was very prominent during the Second Maidan demonstration, labelled ‘Revolution of Values’. Next to the presence of Cardinal Husar (Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church) and

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<sup>11</sup> For details I am relying on Mykhailo Cherenkov, ‘Die Geschichte vom “blutigen Pastor”’, *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, Nr. 3, 2018, 20-22.

<sup>12</sup> Alena Alshanskaya, ‘Das Erbe von Byzanz im geschichts-politischen Diskurs Russlands’, *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, Nr. 7/8/2017, 26-29. Bishop Tikhon (Shevkunov) as archimandrite and trained in filming, had in 2008 produced the documentary *The Fall of an Empire: Lessons from Byzantium*, where Tikhon used the Byzantine heritage to draw analogies to the Third Rome, that now Putin would pursue. There followed numerous articles in the Russian press, also a talk show on state TV. Tikhon continued writing in this vein for <<http://www.pravoslavie.ru>> in spite of then Patriarch Alexei II rejecting the analogy to Byzantium, until in November 2014 an academic conference on Moscow as Third Rome was held. The tone was anti-Western, Russia was to incorporate the other civilisation, the other Europe. Vsevolod Chaplin’s replacement in December 2015 as head of the Synod’s department for church and society relations was Aleksandr Shchishchipkov, a journalist. With the annexation of Crimea, Shchishchipkov spoke of a ‘polyethnic Russian nation’ where various ethnic and social groups would be united in a Russian values matrix, as heritage from Byzantium. Soon after the Tsargrad-TV of Orthodox oligarch Konstantin Malofaev pursued this theme. Putin at Kherson in Crimea in 2015 declared it ‘the sacred source of the Russian nation and its central Asian states’. When on 28 May 2016 the Mount Athos community celebrated the 1000 year anniversary of the presence of Russian monks at Mount Athos, Putin was assigned to sit on the throne reserved for the Byzantine Caesar.

Patriarch Filaret (of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyivan Patriarchate), Turtchinov as an evangelical was the more prominent politician. Soon after he also headed the Ukrainian secret service for internal affairs, that is, Turtchinov helped establish popular recognition of Ukraine as religiously pluralist.

Yet when the Russian Baptist Union (RUECB) met in St Petersburg in May 2014, two months after the Maidan demonstration in Kiev had begun, it issued a condemnation of Baptists and other Christians in Kiev, with the line:

... we proclaim commitment to Biblical teaching, which does not accept the violent overthrow of legitimate authority, nor nationalism, nor the resolution of socio-political differences through means other than political negotiation. 'Do not join with rebellious officials.' (Proverbs 24:21)<sup>13</sup>

The second resolution from that St Petersburg RUECB Congress addressed to Russian President Vladimir Putin, included the lines of gratitude 'for defining and strengthening of the spiritual and moral values, to which the traditional family belongs...' Further they pray that Putin will have 'the strength and courage to remain true to the struggle against manifestations of xenophobia and in the preservation of interconfessional peace in Russia'.<sup>14</sup>

To this the newly elected president of the All-Ukrainian UECB Valerii Antoniuk, in an interview in the RUECB news service, stated that 'if a people speaks the truth, seeks justice, wishes freedom from corruption and desires honest living, then Christians are always called to support that'. As to the coup of February 2014, Antoniuk cited Bonhoeffer's line that 'obedience to tyrants is equal to disobedience towards God'.<sup>15</sup> Anatoly Kaluzhny (Kiev), bishop of the Union of Independent Evangelical Churches in Ukraine, described the Russian Baptist gratitude statement to Putin for cultivating moral values in society as 'the highest form of blasphemy. We know how he lives.'<sup>16</sup>

Truth telling was the moral power that accounted for the non-violent moral revolutions that transformed the former Marxist socialist states of Eastern Europe into more participatory democracies, all in that remarkable year of 1989.<sup>17</sup> That was what Havel had in mind with his 'power of the powerless', a clear reference to the Apostle Paul's remark in Corinthians: 'when I am weak, then am I strong'. It was what Jesus meant in the Sermon on the Mount about 'the meek shall inherit the earth'. In the first edition of

<sup>13</sup> Online Press Release #41, 'Conclusions from the Crisis in Ukraine', 25 July 2014, Dr. William E. Yoder.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Sawatsky, 'Truth Telling: The Liberation and the Burden', *Journal of Church and State* Vol. 33 (1991): 701-729.

his commentary of Martin Luther's Bible in 1521, Luther stated, 'indeed, without violence'. After the Peasant Wars of 1525, Luther dropped the line from later editions, until the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1984 reprinted that first edition!

The truth telling is also 'the liberation and the burden'. In the 1990s there developed many Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, of which the South African one headed by Bishop Desmond Tutu seems the best known. In some countries in Latin America, Philippines, or the GDR, these heavy burden processes made a difference; in the regions of the former Soviet Union there was a phase of opening the archives, of rehabilitation of many falsely accused and long dead, until the population got over-saturated with horror stories. In a book, which includes photo evidence, published by Masha Gesson, she surveyed the mass graves for Jews and other unwanted marginalised peoples. The Memorial Society got organised to dig up the dead, identify them, and bury them with respect. But the sad part is the way the Russian government had steadily placed more obstacles in the way of such memory work.<sup>18</sup>

As we have cast our glances across Eurasian and Eastern European evangelical activities, we have noted the ways in which even the internationally committed evangelical traditions have been sorely tempted by the god of nationhood, of wanting to belong, of ending the two centuries of marginalisation. Evangelicals and oppression have been intertwined because everywhere it was a marginal movement of renewal and reformation, and now in the opening decades of the twenty-first century, state sponsored majoritarianism appears to be winning. But those marginal evangelicals did not disappear, indeed they now constitute almost the second largest block of Christianity globally, next to Roman Catholics. Wherever such evangelicals have sought to dominate, or even to ride on the coattails of socially dominant movements, they have lost moral stature. How to stand in solidarity with other free churches, how to help them recover their faithfulness, how we ourselves might recover the moral energy of compassion for the needy among us? Those are the challenges.

None of the split-away evangelical unions in the former Soviet Union regions have so far found the way to reconciliation, though thankfully there have been many serious attempts. Now one scarcely knows how to report the gap between Ukrainian and Russian Baptists, to say nothing of the way Georgian Baptists, attempting to be as contextually adoptive of Georgian culture as current missiology theory calls us to risk, were invited to leave the

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<sup>18</sup> Masha Gesson and Misha Friedman, *Never Remember. Searching for Stalin's Gulags in Putin's Russia* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2018).



Euro-Asian ECB Federation. How does one get to that breadth of divine mercy of John 3.16?

## Conclusion

Let me conclude with a few quotations from Christian leaders who worked very closely together in Maidan for months during 2014. Mikhailo Dymid, professor for theology and ecclesiology at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, tried to describe a responsible public theology, that he called the theology of Maidan.<sup>19</sup> It was an emerging theology across the confessional boundaries, especially through frequent personal encounters, seeking to ‘grasp the theological meaning for social transformation’ in their case to overcome the culture of corruption. It became a theology against the status quo, that is, each confessional representative’s status quo. It was about finding ‘a Christian way to address social settings of need’. One priest spoke of a new ecclesial consciousness, a unity around the Eucharist, where ‘there were no Greek-Catholics, Roman Catholics, or Orthodox... just Christians. That was completely open and public, that is what we must understand.’<sup>20</sup>

Above all, at least to my astonishment, they reached a political theology through prayer: ‘It is in prayer that the demonstrators themselves develop a political theology, in the way they formulate the ideals and contours of the civil society they desire’. Archbishop Schevtschuk (Uniate) declared, ‘we are convinced that to pray for peace together with those, who in a peaceful way express their desire to live in a *Rechtstaat*, is an appropriate prayer request’.<sup>21</sup> And Ludmila Filipovich observed that Maidan

taught the people to listen to themselves and to others...to learn things they had never done before - it taught us to pray personally and collectively. Prayers changed their behavior, it conveyed to them ideas about reconciliation, and love, and respect. [Prayers] gave them hope, they united people.<sup>22</sup>

## Postscript

The historically savvy reporter on the Velvet Revolution, Timothy Garton Ash, described the aftermath when the dissidents had assumed power by a phrase recalling the years after the 1789 French revolution: *Après le déluge*

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<sup>19</sup> Mykhailo Dymid, ‘Die Theologie des Majdan’, *Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West*, Nr. 3, 2018, 14-16. Dymid, theology professor at Ukrainian Catholic University (Lviv), presented an integration of public theology statement by Baptist theologian Mykhailo Cherenko, Greek Catholic Bishop Boris Gudziak, sociologist Ljudmila Fylypovytsh [all spelling from German spellings of Ukrainian. Author’s trans. from German].

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 15, Orthodox Father Rudeyko.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Archbishop Svjatoslav Schevtschuk, head of the Greek Catholic Church.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

– *nous*. It had become common in Slavic languages during 1989 to speak of ‘them’ (*oni*) as the distant other, those in power who should be blamed; versus ‘us’ (*myi*) – the people. A German slogan had been ‘wir sind das Volk’ (we are the people) – a new identity discovery declaring responsibility for the *civitas*. As in post-revolutionary France, responsible peoplehood turned out to be fleeting.

Without minimising the public theology and theology of collective prayers quoted above, it is prudent to cite a book review entitled *The Revolution that Wasn’t*<sup>23</sup> which this writer noticed upon returning from the conference in Amsterdam. Paul Quinn-Judge, a reporter on Russia since 1986, used two new books whose authors interviewed many participants in the Maidan ‘revolution’, as well as leading persons in the so-called Donetsk Peoples’ Republic. The result was sobering: leaders of those Russia-supported ‘republics’ had ‘zero administrative experience and barely knew one another’; ‘Right-Sector’ supporters did not support that group’s ideology but saw them as ‘the only structure that has not sold out and will not sell out’. At the same time, many Ukrainians were frustrated by President Poroshenko’s ‘failure to address the systemic corruption that permeates all aspects of life’. The people had too easily trusted a small group of Maidan negotiators, who had ‘quickly moved into power after Maidan’, the demonstrators were marginalised, with ‘no regime change’.<sup>24</sup>

That does not look promising for evangelicals in either Russia or Ukraine. The temptation to nationalism has not left them unaffected, but to negotiate a way of integrity within the corruption that ‘permeates all aspects’ seems more personal and more daunting. It may help to recall how much corruption was the Soviet Union’s undoing, and how often people seeking out the evangelicals for their secret to honourable living, had noticed their costly discipleship.

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<sup>23</sup> Paul Quinn-Judge, ‘The Revolution that Wasn’t’, *New York Review of Books*, (19 April 2018), pp. 36-38. The books were Marci Shore, *The Ukrainian Night: An Intimate History of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2018); and Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad: Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus* (Oxford University Press, 2018.)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

## Book Reviews

Jens Holger Schjørring and Norman A. Hjelm (eds.), *History of Global Christianity, ca. 1500 – 1789* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 457 pages. ISBN: 978-9004341920.

This volume is the first in a series of three to be published by Brill on the global history of Christianity since the Reformations of the sixteenth century. Preparations were made during large-scale conferences held at Aarhus and Göttingen (2011, 2015). The results are impressive, because the authors deal with the global history of Christianity in a comprehensive way. Christianity interacts with culture, society, arts and philosophy, politics, and economics in multifaceted ways, and this is what the thirteen contributors succeeded in doing: drawing a global picture of the ‘move of Christianity’ within its own contemporary historical-societal contexts. The move becomes a global shift as the demographic centre turns from the Northern Hemisphere to the South: ‘To trace the history of this global shift is the central aim of this project’ (p. viii).

Christianity was a global religion right from the start. In six of the ten chapters this story is richly illustrated and carefully told as a missionary enterprise circling around Europe, Russia, South Asia, North Africa, and North and Central America. However, as dramatic divisions split the churches in Europe, succeeded by the rise of the Enlightenment and outbreaks of revivals and revolutions, Christianity in Russia (1448-1701), under the Ottoman Rule (1453-1800), in Africa (1500-1800), and in Asia (c. 1500-1789) tends to contextualise more and more under the prevailing non-Christian circumstances. These historical developments comprise the other four chapters.

Hartmut Lehmann extensively treats the *modus operandi* of the research in the introductory chapter by describing the complexity of the enterprise. At least seventeen challenges face a critical description of the history of European Christendom, such as ‘national prejudices’, ‘Eurocentric positions’, ‘freedom of conscience and religion’ and ‘the new developments in arts and sciences’. Methodologically the approach taken strives to overcome evident ‘old school’ Atlantic sentiments and biases, and presents perspectives that are profound and fresh.

For example, the chapters concerning Christianity in Europe from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century (5, 7, 8, 10) not only describe the obvious – the rise of piety, Puritanism, Lutheranism, Calvinism etc. – but also

‘deviant’ thinkers and spirits who turned against the intellectual elites. Furthermore, there is this history of violence that goes along with the history of the spread of Christianity, as Lehmann concludes: ‘But globalization does not mean that one should also speak as if this was a success story. For it was not only in Europe that the Christian churches and groups generally failed to solve conflicts without violence’ (p. 449). If the history of early modern Christianity is to be captured in a common denominator after all (and it cannot), it is ‘not a positive one’. This is a surprising and truthful outcome. I recommend Brill’s *History of Global Christianity*.

Reviewed by Henk Bakker

Timofey Cheprasov, *Like Ripples on the Water: On Russian Baptist Preaching, Identity, and the Pulpit’s Neglected Powers* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 152 pages. ISBN: 978-1532617669.

The English-speaking world has been opened to the important developments in the baptistic communities of Russia in recent years. Knowledge of the lives of these believing communities was at one time only possible through the efforts of Baptist leaders such as E. A. Payne and D. S. Russell.

Recently much better understanding has become possible because IBTS has raised up younger scholars from eastern Europe who have opened up these communities to us. Timofey (Tima) Cheprasov is such a one. From a Baptist home in Voronezh in Russia, as a linguist, he helped in the development of a School of Preaching run by IBTS in 1999 and based in Bryansk, Russia under the leadership of David M. Brown (IBTS). Brown’s book *Transformational Preaching* developed out of that preaching school and continues to be widely used as a text book in Russia (translated from the English by Tima Cheprasov). Brown’s encouragement led Tima Cheprasov to study at IBTS in Prague, where he gained a Doctorate, on which this book, *Like Ripples on the Water*, is based.

The author explores how the church in Russia has been shaped by the weekly exposition of the Word, generally in three sermons. This pattern has been formative in shaping the believing communities. Cheprasov has researched the relationship between the preaching ministry and the virtues and practices of these worshipping communities.

Cheprasov seeks to explore the identity of local Russian Baptist communities based on his own experience, research, and mature reflection of the present realities. He explores the way Orthodoxy is built into these

communities and he picks out several key themes of theosis, sobornost, and charismatic preaching to reflect on the way baptistic communities developed.

All of this sets a scene for the challenge of the present day as baptistic communities live with new freedoms and recognition, younger believers enjoy educational opportunities, and the churches are forced to look afresh at preaching styles, the place of theological education and the development of hermeneutical tools which take account of theological and Biblical knowledge which was previously closed off to them.

Cheprasov uses the notion of the late Jim McClendon that convictional communities of belief have powerful practices shaping who they are and how they cohere. This book opens up in a remarkable way aspects of Russian baptistic life and it also provides material for reflection for those who engage in the work of formation of ministers to communities not only in Russia, but also elsewhere.

**Reviewed by Keith G. Jones**

Jay D. Green, *Christian Historiography: Five Rival Versions* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2015), 236 pages. ISBN: 978-1481302630.

As a believer and a historian with a secular education, I was interested to hear what Jay D. Green, professor of history at Covenant College, had to say about Christian historiography. As he states in the introduction, his intention with this book is to present the believing historian and student of history with several ways (he calls them ‘versions’ and underlines that they are not ‘schools of interpretation’ or ‘philosophies of history’) in which faith has informed the approach to historical studies.

All five versions have their advocates and there are many who would see their version trump other ways of doing history. Green acknowledges the value in each and explains their roots and developments, while he also does not fail to criticise them where he sees fit. He displays a knowledge of the field that only comes from wide reading (as the bibliography testifies), the downside of which is that some parts read like a string of book reviews, but this cannot be avoided in an overview treatment of such modest length. In addition, these versions are all American in their origin, which makes it less useful, but perhaps all the more revealing to a European student of history (in Europe there is virtually no tradition of ‘Christian’ historiography).

Green has greatly informed me, but has not converted me to either of these five ‘rival’ versions. His most valuable contribution for me in this book comes in the conclusion where he introduces his discussion of vocation with the following passage, in which he also succinctly summarises the five versions he has investigated [numbering is mine]:

Whether (1) bringing an emphatic ear to the lives of past religious people, (2) striving to exercise background faith commitments in assessing primary sources, (3) applying Christian values to past human events, (4) defending the truth of Christianity by looking at its presence in history, or (5) aspiring to see God’s hand in the vents of cultural development, the enterprise of historical study has and will remain a vital interest to Christians everywhere and stands as a necessary calling in service to God’s kingdom.

This to me sums up the core value of the book, but it is a shame that it is necessary to make this self-evident point to the believing student of history.

**Reviewed by Pieter van Wingerden**

Vladimir Ubeivolc, *Rethinking Missio Dei among Evangelical Churches in an Eastern European Orthodox Context* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2016), 320 pages. ISBN: 978-1783681044.

Though Langham Monographs has published a number of volumes illuminating for the readers of Asian and African theology, it has also added significantly to the wider knowledge of Eastern European Evangelicals. These volumes are not only about Eastern European church and history, but in many cases are also written by Eastern European authors. Vladimir Ubeivolc’s book falls into this category. The title is somewhat misleading, as it seems to refer to a broader treatise of Evangelicals’ mission in Orthodox contexts. However, the book concentrates on Moldova, and as such is a very welcome contribution – both as a historical account and as an analysis of mission paradigms and methods in Moldovan Evangelical churches and in Orthodoxy. The comparison of the mission approaches in these two traditions is helpful, even if it seems to reveal more differences than similarities. The author, nevertheless, is optimistic: ‘...there are a lot of common points which could play a key role for further conversation’ (p. 226).

The author argues that the ‘ecumenical concept’ of *Missio Dei* forms a promising basis for finding a mutual ground for Evangelical and Orthodox missiology in Moldova. It is trinitarian and ‘directs to the holistic approach in mission, which is very close to the Orthodox understanding of church’s mission’ (p. 192). The final chapter contains some recommendations for

Evangelical churches, including preference of the term ‘witness’ instead of ‘evangelism’, which would hopefully help the Moldovan Evangelicals in implementing their missional identity in an Orthodox setting. While the book provides useful information and defines theological frameworks of mission, the reader, nevertheless, is left with some questions. How does the theological analysis, aiming at cooperation in mission, actually translate into the practice of churches in Moldova? Does it provide tools for better mutual understanding between Evangelicals and Orthodox, especially as for the Orthodox the ‘unity of faith’ is the prerequisite for mission. The book states that for ‘building fraternal relations between Evangelical and Orthodox believers, concrete actions should be undertaken in this direction’ (p. 269). Are there any steps towards this goal that have materialised in Moldova? While the book addresses the Evangelical churches, and understandably so, the reader would have expected to hear the local Moldovan Orthodox voice more clearly. In summary: this is helpful reading material for scholars and students both in the field of Eastern European church history and in missiology.

**Reviewed by Toivo Pilli**